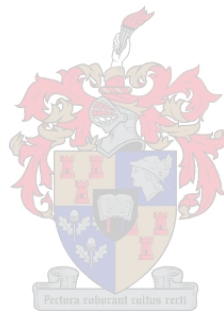


Student engagement as a way of enhancing student success at a private higher education institution

by

Erika Theron

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Master of Philosophy in Higher Education in the Faculty of Education
at Stellenbosch University*



Supervisor: Prof EM Bitzer

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Relevant literature in higher education indicates that the higher education scene is changing fast and that higher education providers and their educators are at the centre of such change. The changing student body is of particular interest to higher education providers as the changing needs of students result in new inquiries into how current students learn and perform. Student engagement is widely suggested as a means of addressing the changing nature of the current generation of students and enhancing student success. Student engagement may be defined as the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to the desired higher education outcomes. Student success is no longer considered merely as cognitive competence as there is a greater understanding today of what makes up the entire student and his or her learning needs.

This study was aimed at determining to what extent student engagement is being promoted at a private higher education institution in the Western Cape, South Africa. A mixed method research design was applied. Self-constructed questionnaires were distributed to staff members and students at the institution and semi-structured interviews with individual staff members and focus group interviews with students were also conducted. Both quantitative and qualitative data were generated and appropriately analysed.

From the findings of this study a number of issues emerged. Firstly, it was revealed that the institution as a private provider in the field of culinary arts and hospitality and its educators recognise the changing nature of their students. Secondly, staff seem committed to the concept of student engagement and related practices to foster student success. Thirdly, students acknowledge engagement in their own learning as a favourable feature, but indicate further engagement opportunities to be created by their lecturing staff and the institution. A number of implications also emerged from the study. It is evident that lecturers at The Private Hotel School may aim to gain a better understanding of the current generation of students and they may also focus on determining more ways to facilitate engagement. Furthermore, it is evident that

students at this institution may be made more aware of their role in engaging in their own learning.

OPSOMMING

Die relevante literatuur in hoër onderwys dui daarop dat die hoërondewysomgewing besig is om vinnig te verander en dat die verskaffers van hoër onderwys en hul opvoeders sentraal staan in sulke verandering. Die veranderende behoeftes van studente dien as aansporing vir nuwe navorsing oor hoe teenswoordige studente leer en presteer; gevolglik is die veranderende studenteliggaam van besondere belang vir die verskaffers van hoër onderwys. Daar word algemeen aanbeveel dat studentebetrokkenheid ondersoek word om die veranderende aard van die huidige geslag studente te verken en studentesukses te verhoog. Studentebetrokkenheid kan gedefinieer word as die tyd en moeite wat studente aan aktiwiteite wat empiries verbind kan word met verlangde uitkomst in hoër onderwys. Studentesukses word nie meer gesien as slegs kognitiewe bevoegdheid nie aangesien daar tans meer begrip is van wat die hele student en sy of haar leerbehoeftes behels.

Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om te bepaal tot watter mate studentebetrokkenheid bevorder word by 'n private hoërondewysinstelling in die Wes-Kaap, Suid-Afrika. 'n Gemengde-metode navorsingsontwerp is gebruik, en self-opgestelde vraelyste is aan personeellede en studente by die instelling uitgedeel. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gevoer met individuele personeellede en fokusgroep-onderhoude is met studente gedoen. Beide kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe data is gegenereer en toepaslik ontleed.

'n Aantal kwessies het vanuit die bevindinge van hierdie studie aan die lig gekom: Eerstens, dat die opvoeders van die instelling as 'n private verskaffer op die terrein van kulinêre kuns en gasvryheid die veranderende aard van hul studente herken; tweedens, dat die personeel verbind is tot die bevordering van studentebetrokkenheid en verwante praktyke om studentesukses te bevorder; en derdens, dat studente betrokkenheid in hul eie leerproses as 'n positiewe doelstelling beskou, maar dat verdere geleenthede tot betrokkenheid geskep kan word deur hul doserende personeel en die instelling. 'n Aantal verdere implikasies het ook vanuit

hierdie studie aan die lig gekom. Dit is duidelik dat dosente by The Private Hotel School nog 'n groter poging kan aanwend om die huidige geslag studente beter te begryp en dat hulle ook kan probeer om meer maniere te vind om studentebetrokkenheid te fasiliteer. Dit blyk verder dat studente by hierdie instelling nog meer bewus kan raak van hoe hulle self tot groter betrokkenheid by hulle eie leerproses kan bydra.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
OPSOMMING	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF ADDENDA	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xv
Chapter 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Description of the problem	2
1.3 Research question.....	4
1.3.1 Sub-questions.....	5
1.4 Aim of the study	5
1.5 Significance of the study	5
1.6 Research design and methods	6
1.6.1 Data analysis	7
1.6.2 Validity and reliability of the study	8
1.6.3 Research location	8
1.6.4 Ethical considerations.....	9
1.7 Clarification of terms and concepts	9
1.8 Conclusion.....	10
Chapter 2: LITERATURE PERSPECTIVES.....	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Purpose and focus of this chapter.....	12
2.3 The current generation of students	13
2.3.1 Understanding the current generation of students	13

2.3.2	The challenges presented by the current generation	16
2.3.3	The benefits of the current generation	17
2.3.4	How to teach the current generation	17
2.4	Conceptualising student engagement	19
2.4.1	The relevance of student engagement.....	22
2.4.1.1	Engaged versus disengaged students	26
2.4.2	How to facilitate student engagement	26
2.4.3	Assessing student engagement	32
2.5	Conceptualising student success.....	34
2.5.1	Predictors of student success	35
2.5.2	Factors that have an impact on student success	37
2.5.3	Determining student success	39
2.5.4	How to help students achieve success	41
2.6	Conclusion.....	43
Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY		47
3.1	Introduction.....	47
3.1.1	Pragmatism as a research paradigm or lens.....	48
3.2	Purpose and aims of the study	48
3.2.1	Research question.....	49
3.2.1.1	Research sub-questions	49
3.2.2	Aim and objectives of the study	49
3.3	Research design and methods	50
3.3.1	The FraIM.....	50
3.3.2	Applying the extended FraIM to this study	52
3.3.2.1	The research question	52
3.3.2.2	Cases	54
3.3.2.3	Methods.....	54
3.3.2.4	Data and data analysis	54

3.3.2.5 Evidence, claims and conclusions	54
3.3.3 Research methods.....	55
3.3.3.1 Questionnaires	55
3.3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews.....	56
3.3.3.3 Sampling	57
3.4 Data generation	58
3.4.1 Generating data from student questionnaires	58
3.4.2 Generating data from staff questionnaires	59
3.4.3 Generating data from student interviews.....	60
3.4.4 Generating data from staff interviews	61
3.5 Data analysis	61
3.5.1 Data analysis of questionnaires	61
3.5.2 Data analysis of interviews	62
3.6 Validity of the study.....	62
3.6.1 Validity.....	62
3.6.2 Reliability	63
3.6.3 Trustworthiness	64
3.7 Ethical considerations.....	65
3.8 Conclusion.....	67
Chapter 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	69
4.1 Introduction.....	69
4.2 Questionnaires	69
4.2.1 Student questionnaires	69
4.2.1.1 Demographic information.....	69
4.2.1.2 Students' perceptions of student engagement	79
4.2.1.3 Students' perceptions of the institutional role in student engagement	84
4.2.1.4 Holistic development.....	87
4.2.1.5 Academic focus and commitment	88

4.2.2	Staff questionnaires	96
4.2.2.1	Demographic information	96
4.2.2.2	Staff's perceptions of student engagement	97
4.2.2.3	Use of engagement practices	99
4.2.2.4	Prioritising student engagement	100
4.3	Interviews	102
4.3.1	Student focus group interviews	102
4.3.1.1	Interviews with student focus groups	102
4.3.2	Staff interviews	108
4.3.2.1	Academic staff's views on student engagement.....	108
4.3.2.2	Facilitating student engagement	109
4.4	Conclusion.....	111
4.4.1	Findings on TPHS students	111
4.4.2	Findings on TPHS academic staff.....	112
Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS		114
5.1	Introduction.....	114
5.2	Conclusions	114
5.2.1	Current perceptions at The Private Hotel School of student engagement	115
5.2.1.1	Students' perceptions of student engagement	115
5.2.1.2	Staff's perceptions of student engagement	116
5.2.1.3	Final conclusions regarding perceptions of student engagement at The Private Hotel School	116
5.2.2	Facilitating student engagement	117
5.2.3	Engagement for success	117
5.3	Implications of the study	118
5.3.1	Conceptual implications.....	118
5.3.2	Practical implications	118
5.3.3	Implications for further research.....	119

5.4	Final remarks.....	119
	REFERENCE LIST	121

LIST OF ADDENDA

Addendum A:	Staff interview questions	132
Addendum B:	Student focus group interview questions	133
Addendum C:	Example of transcribed interview data as generated from one focus group	134
Addendum D:	Example of transcribed interview data as generated from one staff respondent	136
Addendum E:	Ethics Committee approval notice	137
Addendum F:	Informed consent form for staff	140
Addendum G:	Informed consent form for students	143
Addendum H:	Institutional permission letters	146

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	The role of student engagement in the current higher education environment	45
Figure 3.1	The basic structure of the FraIM	50
Figure 3.2	The extended FraIM	51
Figure 4.1	Age distribution of student participants	70
Figure 4.2	Student self-motivation related to their age	71
Figure 4.3	Gender distribution of student participants	72
Figure 4.4	Duration of course	73
Figure 4.5	Students enrolled for short courses' feeling about engagement	73
Figure 4.6	Ethnic distribution of student participants	74
Figure 4.7	Ethnic groups' tendency to ask questions in class	75
Figure 4.8	First language distribution of student participants	76
Figure 4.9	Students' first language compared to their perception of peers	77
Figure 4.10	Marital status of student participants	78
Figure 4.11	Allocation of time to class preparation	89
Figure 4.12	Time students spent working per week to earn money	90
Figure 4.13	Time students spent participating in activities other than attending class per week	90
Figure 4.14	Time students spent taking care of others per week	91
Figure 4.15	Students' travelling time to and from class per week	92
Figure 4.16	Time students spent studying for tests per week	93
Figure 4.17	Time students spent completing assignments per week	93
Figure 4.18	Time students spent socialising with friends per week	94
Figure 4.19	Time students spent exercising per week	95
Figure 4.20	Time students spent sleeping per week	95

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Roles of academic staff in the assessment of student engagement	33
Table 3.1	Advantages and disadvantages of using closed-ended questions	55
Table 3.2	Advantages and disadvantages of using open-ended questions	57
Table 4.1	Students' perceptions of their own engagement in learning	79
Table 4.2	Students' views on participation in engagement practices	80
Table 4.3	How students prefer to participate in additional engagement opportunities if offered	84
Table 4.4	TPHS students' perceptions of the emphasis TPHS places on engagement activities	85
Table 4.5	Students of TPHS's relationship with other entities at the institution	86
Table 4.6	TPHS's contribution towards students' holistic development	87
Table 4.7	Academic staff's perception of student engagement	97
Table 4.8	Lecturers' in-class activities that may facilitate student engagement	99
Table 4.9	Lecturers' division of working day priorities	100

Chapter 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that higher education can contribute significantly to an individual's future career and ultimately to the well-being of societies (Kuh, 2007; Cruce, Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh & Shoup, 2008; Kranstuber, Carr & Hosek, 2011:44; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2011:13). Therefore it is important that higher education institutions are accountable for their role in fostering student success (Nauffal, 2012:172). This study is concerned with student engagement in higher education as a possible means to foster student success. Research on the topic of student engagement is ongoing (Kuh, 2009:5; Garrett, 2011:1) as many scholars in higher education agree that student engagement is a key aspect when aiming to facilitate meaningful learning (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson & Johnson, 2005:1; Coates, 2007:122; Kuh, 2009:5; Strydom, Kuh & Mentz, 2010:263; Garrett, 2011:2; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington & Clarke, 2012:84; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White & Salovey, 2012:700; Wawrzynski, Heck & Remley, 2012:106; Van Uden, Ritzen & Pieters, 2013:43) and ultimately enhance student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005:44; Wyatt, 2011; Henning, 2012). Recent research has indicated that institutions and lecturers are increasingly recognising the positive impact of student engagement, especially how it relates to more holistic notions of student success and thus encouraging active student engagement through teaching practices (NSSE, 2012:7). Some authors go as far as to say that how students approach their learning and how educators facilitate student learning may be more important than the curriculum itself (Smith *et al.*, 2005:1). Furthermore, the agreed stance that the traditional lecture format of teaching is no longer adequate or the best practice (Mann, 2001:7; Smith *et al.*, 2005:11) has also led to an increased emphasis on student engagement as it is believed that student engagement is one of the answers to maximising students' learning and academic success (Nauffal, 2012:171; Reyes *et al.*, 2012). In turn, such success may point to institutional effectiveness (Nauffal,

2011:171). Taking a holistic view, Salmon (1989, cited in Mann, 2001:7) explains that it is important to engage students' viewpoints and opinions so that they may become active members of society and thereby promote lifelong learning (Carini, Kuh & Klein, 2006:2; Kuh, 2009:5). However, promoting student engagement, especially in the early student years, is more easily said than done (Wyatt, 2011). The challenge thus seems to be to actively encourage student engagement in ways that are integrated into regular teaching and learning practices (Nelson *et al.*, 2012:83) while implementing curricula. The next section presents an overview of the problem situation to provide a context for the study.

1.2 Description of the problem

Studies in the field of higher education concur that the higher education scene worldwide is changing. Such changes include competition and technological improvements (Barnett, 2000:3; Newman, 2000:17; Tight, 2003:4; Ortega & Aguillo, 2009:272; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012), shifts in demographics and increased globalisation (Barnett, 2000:3; Newman, 2000:17; Tight, 2003:4; Weber, 2005:990; Neale-Shutte & Fourie, 2006:122; Leahy, 2012:182; Choudaha, 2013), to mention a few. Another important change is the trend of decreased government involvement in some countries, bringing about opportunities for market-driven decision making (Newman, 2000:17) and favouring academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Fourie, 2009). The matter of accountability (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009:19; Cruce *et al.*, 2008:540) is also increasingly being discussed as higher education institutions are preparing a future workforce (Mott, 2000:24; CHE, 2004b; Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim & Wilcox, 2013:247). These changes present various challenges to educators in higher education (Newman, 2000:17; Choudaha, 2013) which will be discussed throughout the rest of this section.

Many social and economic factors such as those mentioned are changing students' motivation to study and subsequently also their engagement in their own learning. Therefore one may no longer assume that students will naturally engage with classroom teaching practices (Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2014) as more knowledge is being produced in shorter periods of time and students have much better access to such information (Frick & Kapp, 2009:255). Much of the change in higher education

worldwide is partly due to a proliferation of information with lecturers at the centre of the challenges of change (Mott, 2000:24; Frick & Kapp, 2009:255). Further pressure is put on higher education providers as society is placing an increasingly high premium on education, recognising that it plays a vital role in preparing the future workforce in knowledge economies (Kaminski & Bolliger, 2012:13), with an increased emphasis on continuing professional development of higher education staff (Mott, 2000:23; Frick & Kapp, 2007:443). This raises the question of whether educators in higher education possess the knowledge and skills required to stay abreast of these demanding changes (Frick & Kapp, 2007:443). Adding to the challenge, higher education in South Africa faces multiple stakeholder demands for greater responsiveness to societal needs and institutional accountability for maintaining quality and standards (Mott, 2000:24; CHE, 2004a). Luckett and Sutherland (2000:99, in Geyser, 2004:91) suggest that in response to these challenges lecturers nowadays are required to show greater accountability towards the community, their students and governing bodies. They also need to recognise the diverse student bodies they are expected to educate and aim to fulfil the needs of each student accordingly. This may be achieved by making use of a variety of assessment methods as well as ways to engage students in their learning. To add to the complexity, Lamanauskas (2011:216) identified technology as a challenging factor, one that has a major impact on education: "New technologies consistently and rather aggressively keep penetrating into educational practice. Therefore, we have to discuss in essence the urgent problems of digital teaching, to analyse the emerging challenges both for the teachers and students." Educators may use the technology that students are exposed to every day to enhance their learning, but in order to do so they first have to understand such technology. This state of affairs often creates tension and challenges. Lamanauskas (2011) explains that using digital teaching aids makes the teaching and learning experience more interesting and potentially more effective as students may show greater interest and therefore possibly engage more. This being said, the use of technology in teaching brings about many challenges for both lecturers and students, mainly caused by teacher incompetence in using technology as well as a lack of the digital literacy of students. One might therefore say that digital teaching on its own is not effective, but used in conjunction with conventional and proven teaching strategies and methods may hold

much benefit for all those concerned. Another major challenge higher education providers face is that students who come from secondary education are not properly prepared for higher education (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:351; Kuh, 2007; Westerman, 2007; Kuh *et al.*, 2011:13; Strom & Strom, 2013:53).

In view of all these changes resulting in challenges for higher education providers, the need has arisen to investigate new approaches to curriculum, teaching and learning (Hallinger & Lu, 2013: 594). With a new generation of students and other changes in the higher education arena underway, educators should take responsibility to create learning environments where students are not merely expected to reproduce the knowledge they have gained, but rather apply and demonstrate an understanding of their knowledge. Therefore, educators may be expected to focus less on the content of a module and more on what the desired outcomes of a module should be. Students could be encouraged to integrate knowledge and skills over a broad scope of disciplines in order to gain a holistic understanding of society and the industry they aspire to work in (Kuh *et al.*, 2011). All the while educators can and should positively influence students to become lifelong learners to keep abreast of continuous changes.

In view of the context of this study provided in the previous paragraphs, one might argue that the quality of student learning (not only student performance) can be improved with well-planned and effective student engagement; therefore, this study investigated what research tells us on the topic of student engagement in higher education. Such research may be useful in gauging how student engagement is practised (or not practised) at one private higher education institution.

1.3 Research question

Against the background as sketched in section 1.2 and the challenge of engaging students in their own learning, the research question posed by this study was as follows:

How, if at all, is student engagement currently employed at The Private Hotel School (TPHS) as a possible strategy to enhance student success?

1.3.1 Sub-questions

In order to answer the main question, four subsidiary questions were posed:

- What does student engagement entail?
- What student engagement practices are currently used by lecturing staff at TPHS?
- What are current students' perceptions of the value of learning engagement at TPHS?
- What possible student engagement strategies may enhance student success at TPHS?

1.4 Aim of the study

In view of the posed research questions the main aim of the study was to explore how, if at all, student engagement is currently employed to enhance student success at The Private Hotel School (TPHS).

The objectives of the study were the following:

- To explore, from a literature perspective, what student engagement entails
- To determine what student engagement practices are currently used by lecturing staff at TPHS
- To determine current students' perceptions of the value of learning engagement at TPHS
- To identify possible strategies whereby student engagement may enhance student success at TPHS

1.5 Significance of the study

The significance of this study was judged to be threefold. Firstly, this study was meant to explore the implications of changes in the current student body – not only at TPHS, but also in general as reported in the literature. It is important to recognise that students are different and therefore learn and develop in different ways (Morgan, 2014:34; Patterson, 2014). Educators are expected to increase their awareness of

strategies and develop the relevant strategies to address the diversity of student needs with which they are faced. Secondly, according to many reports in the media and by scholars in the field of education, secondary school systems (also in South Africa) do not always adequately prepare learners for higher education (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:351; Kuh, 2007; Westerman, 2007; Kuh *et al.*, 2011:13; Strom & Strom, 2013:53). This puts pressure on higher education institutions to fill the gap left by secondary education in addition to what is already expected from a higher education institution. Studies such as these may thus indicate which teaching strategies/methods/techniques that involve student engagement may be more suitable for enhancing the engagement of students in their own learning and ultimately lead to greater success. Thirdly, higher education institutions are experiencing increased pressure to demonstrate accountability as they are responsible for the preparation of a future workforce (Mott, 2000:24; CHE, 2004b; Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.*, 2013:247). In South Africa, such accountability is of major concern within the context of a developing country. It is thus vital that quality higher education is offered and that students are engaged in their own learning in order to prepare them in the best possible way for their future careers as well as for lifelong learning.

1.6 Research design and methods

This section only presents a brief summary of the key research design and methodology issues of the study. A full description is provided in Chapter 3.

The study was conducted from a pragmatic stance (Plowright, 2011) as it is of material importance to potentially address an important current challenge at one institution (TPHS), namely to utilise and enhance student engagement in order to potentially further student success. The design used for the study was Plowright's framework for an integrated methodology (FraIM) which is in essence a mixed methods design. A survey amongst students and staff at TPHS generated data by using the SASSE (South African Survey on Student Engagement) (Strydom *et al.*, 2010) as a basis for self-constructed questionnaires for staff and students. Participants in the questionnaire survey included five educators and 50 students at TPHS during 2014.

The questionnaire for the students and staff included only closed questions. Both questionnaires contained sections intended to determine demographic information of participants. The questionnaires were distributed to the students during a school day when all students were assembled in one venue on TPHS campus and participants could complete them in their own time. All students who volunteered to participate in the survey decided to complete the questionnaires immediately, which took about 15 to 20 minutes. Fifty questionnaires were handed out to students, and 47 were returned. The participation was voluntary and three students chose not to participate. The staff survey questionnaires were distributed to staff during a normal work day. They opted to complete the questionnaires in their own time and it took between one and three days for the questionnaires to be returned. Five questionnaires were handed out to staff and all five were returned. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. As the number of participants at TPHS was limited to the 2014 body of students and all current staff, no data other than descriptive statistics were generated.

The SASSE-based questionnaire survey was followed by interviews with the five individual staff members as well as two focus group interviews with a randomly selected group of four TPHS students. The interviews with staff members were conducted during the student recess week in September 2014 as staff members do not have any teaching responsibilities during this week. The focus group interviews with students were conducted during the last week of the third term of 2014. The students were selected to represent intakes from different semesters in order to obtain a true representation of the entire period students spend at TPHS. The interviews were conducted to further explore, confirm or refute the trends that emerged from the survey data.

1.6.1 Data analysis

Methods for analysing both numerical and narrative data generated by the questionnaires and interviews were descriptive statistics and content analysis (Neuman, 1997:31; Plowright, 2011). To analyse the data of both the student and staff questionnaires, the data were captured in a standalone statistical software programme, Moonstats©. This programme provides the statistical tools for data

exploration and data description (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). Once data have been entered into the system, descriptive statistical computations and bivariate statistics are available. For each category the programme generated charts and variables could be related via graphical representations. The narrative data generated by the interviews were grouped according to categories and themes (Plowright, 2011) and then related to questionnaire findings and conceptual understandings of student engagement.

1.6.2 Validity and reliability of the study

Validity and reliability aspects are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Validity is explained to be the "... the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in a situation" (Welman *et al.*, 2005:142). Stainback and Stainback (1984, cited in Welman *et al.*, 2005:9) state that measures need to be in place for both qualitative and quantitative data to be valid and reliable. This is important as reliability is mainly concerned with how credible and consistent findings are (Welman *et al.*, 2005:145) while research is valid if it is a true reflection of the phenomenon being studied (Plowright, 2011:135).

1.6.3 Research location

The research on student engagement as a possible way of enhancing student success at a private higher education institution was conducted at The Private Hotel School (TPHS). TPHS is located close to the town of Stellenbosch and is a registered and accredited private higher education provider with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE). It offers the following qualifications:

- Higher Certificate in Hospitality Management, NQF level 5
- Advanced Certificate in Hospitality Management, NQF level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Hospitality Management: Culinary specialisation NQF level 6
- Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Education, NQF level 7

TPHS prides itself on offering quality higher education, which is more probable with smaller classes; therefore, TPHS only takes in a limited number of students each

year. There are two intakes per year, one in January and another in July. On average, the January intake ranges between 20 and 30 students and the July intake is between 10 and 15 students. To meet the demands of these students, TPHS employs 13 staff members consisting of one director, one vice-dean, one academic manager, one financial manager, three full-time lecturers, one part-time lecturer, an administrative coordinator, an events coordinator, a receptionist, a kitchen assistant and a housekeeper. The management and academic staff of TPHS agreed that this study would be advantageous to the school and its teaching and that the findings may potentially inform some changes and improvements at the institution.

1.6.4 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations with regard to this study are discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Literature on ethics in research was studied and the institutional ethical clearance processes of the University of Stellenbosch were followed before the study commenced. The researcher presented a research proposal to the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education after which adjustments were made based on their recommendations. The research proposal was then submitted to the Ethics Committee for Human and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University for approval. The study and data collection could only continue once approval was obtained. All documentation relating to conducting the study in an ethical manner is attached as addenda as the last documents of this thesis.

1.7 Clarification of terms and concepts

A number of key terms which are used in this study are explained in more detail in Chapter 2. However, working definitions for key terms, namely 'student engagement', 'student success' and 'pragmatism' are provided here since these terms are central to the study. These definitions are seen as operational definitions adopted for this study:

Student engagement: Student engagement is considered the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired learning outcomes as expected by the institution where they are enrolled as students (Henning, 2012).

Student engagement in learning: When engaged in their learning, students actively think about and take part in learning activities with the aim of improving academic achievement, cognitive development, moral and ethical development, psychological development and practical competence (Henning, 2012).

Student success: Student success is not merely reflected by the marks students achieve in learning assessments. It also includes intellectual competence, sustained interpersonal relationships, personal and identity development, preparedness for a future career, maintained health and wellness, being a socially responsible member of society and being sensitive to diversity issues (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001).

Pragmatism: Pragmatism is demonstrated in a research paradigm that takes a pragmatic perspective on the matter being studied and aims at an integrated approach that allows for mixed methods of data collection (Plowright, 2011).

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the purpose of this study and what was inquired into. To summarise: The research question of this study is, “How, if at all, is student engagement currently employed at The Private Hotel School (TPHS) as a possible strategy to enhance student success?”. The study thus investigated the current situation at TPHS pertaining to its efforts to promote student engagement and to ultimately enhance the possibility towards student success.

Before I describe the research design and methods (Chapter 3) which informed the results and discussion in Chapter 4, I report in Chapter 2 on relevant literature which was explored to inform this study theoretically. Finally, in Chapter 5 I draw some conclusions from the study results and highlight some of the implications of the study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE PERSPECTIVES

2.1 Introduction

The South African higher education environment has been undergoing transformation since 1994 (Jansen & Taylor, 2003; CHE, 2004b; Wyatt, 2011; CHE, 2013). The changes occurring in the higher education environment also cause a re-evaluation of and changes to the teaching practices of educators. Traditional teaching methods are not entirely disregarded, but are no longer considered adequate as the sole approach to facilitating learning (Mann, 2001:7; Smith *et al.*, 2005:1), especially since they do not allow much scope for student engagement (Mennenga, 2013) which has been identified as a key aspect of fostering student success (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:44; Wyatt, 2011; Henning, 2012). The current generation of students in higher education requires a different approach to teaching and learning (Anon, 2014a) and a noteworthy suggestion is that students should be encouraged to become less dependent on their educators and take more responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. Governments around the world are also increasing the focus on higher education institutions' contribution towards student success or "graduateness" (CHE, 2013). The term 'student success' refers to the notion of holistic development of students, as opposed to mere cognitive or academic development, therefore student success involves the whole student and is multidimensional (Hunter, 2006:4). Students are expected to be well-rounded professionals with various skills and capabilities. Therefore much emphasis is being placed on higher education for individual professional development of students that equips them for the demands of their chosen career and to be responsible members of their community (Kuh, 2007; Cruce *et al.*, 2008; Kranstuber *et al.*, 2011:44; Kuh *et al.*, 2011:13). The following paragraph provides a brief overview of student engagement while other sections in this chapter discuss various aspects of student engagement in more detail.

Student engagement is identified as a tool to achieve holistic student development, or holistic student success (Salmon, 1989, cited in Mann, 2001:7; Lewis, Huebner,

Malone & Valois, 2011:251; Henning, 2012:15). Student engagement may be defined as the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college (Henning, 2012:15; Smith, Warland & Smith, 2012:151). Student engagement, however, is a very broad concept and may be pursued in many ways. Examples of student engagement activities that educators may use include problem solving exercises, role plays, debates, group work, class discussions, self- and peer-assessment and creating real-life situations where students can practise practical applications of theory, to name a few (Smith *et al.*, 2012:151). It is therefore suggested that educators in higher education concentrate on how they may encourage students to engage in their own learning, moving away from merely lecturing as a teaching format (Mann, 2001:7; Smith *et al.*, 2005:11) and rather taking on the role of a facilitator (Collins & Tilson, 2001:176). Henning (2012:15) quotes Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2007) in explaining that although students have the responsibility to create opportunities for their own engagement, institutions should also be proactive in their approach to allocating resources to foster an environment with opportunities in which students can freely engage in the learning process. For student engagement to be effective, however, it must be determined whether students perceive engagement activities as valuable, contributing to their learning and helping them with the internalisation of knowledge and skills. One might argue that students will learn more from engagement activities if they believe such activities will benefit them in some way.

2.2 Purpose and focus of this chapter

As mentioned in the previous section, there are various factors causing change in higher education and the focus is on student engagement as a way to address the ever-changing needs of the current generation of students to ultimately enhance student success. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a number of aspects to consider when conducting research on student engagement as a way of potentially enhancing student success, particularly in private higher education. First, the nature and characteristics of the current student body – pointing at changes that are taking place and what these changes mean for educators in higher education – are discussed. Next, this chapter provides a conceptualisation of the

construct 'student engagement' before providing a more in-depth exploration and discussion on student success.

2.3 The current generation of students

Many researchers in the field of higher education allude to the characteristics and behaviour of the current generation of students (Nicolson, 1999:80; Newman, 2000:18; Choudaha, 2013; Anon, 2014a; McGrath, 2014). This section addresses some of the matters and issues concerning a current student generation that participates in higher education. It is necessary to take note of and understand these matters and issues to discuss student engagement within the context of what forms the core of higher education, namely its body of students.

2.3.1 Understanding the current generation of students

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that the only constant is change. Higher education institutions play a vital role in society and Lebeau (2008:141) rightfully argues that, in times of change, higher education institutions have often been at the forefront of facilitating new values and socialising members of society to conform (Yorke & Longden, 2004). Changes in society require higher education systems and institutions to focus more on creating global awareness among students, increasing their tolerance of diversity (Nicolson, 1999:80) and developing their ability to function within a team (Newman, 2000:18). In view of all these changes, governments all over the world are increasingly focussing on escalating investment in education, training and development (Barnett, 2000:2; Tight, 2003:4, Choudaha, 2013). Along with increases in expenditure on higher education comes an increased concern that money is to be spent wisely. Therefore much more research is being done to determine whether the quality and standards of higher education are satisfactory (Barnett, 2000:2; Tight, 2003:4, Choudaha, 2013). Change is true for higher education as the reality is that the behaviour, needs, expectations and motivations of the student body are changing (Newman, 2000:17; Choudaha, 2013). Collins and Tilson (2001:172) state that one of the most challenging changes in higher education is the ever-changing nature of the students as a new generation requires new inquiry into their learning behaviour and characteristics. The current generation of students

is very different to their predecessors (Anon, 2014a). They are more informed, self-confident, technologically advanced and ambitious (McGrath, 2014).

The current generation, referred to as “the Millennials” (Collins & Tilson, 2001:172) or “Generation Y” (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:34) is considered significantly different from previous generations (Newman, 2000:17; Westerman, 2007; Choudaha, 2013). They are typically referred to as “... the benefactors of society’s heightened awareness of children” (Collins & Tilson, 2001:173). Generation Y is currently considered the fastest growing segment of today’s workforce (Westerman, 2007; Kane, 2014); therefore it is pivotal to take note of their characteristics and demands as we in higher education are expected to prepare them adequately for future careers. In order to do so it is vital that educators in higher education gain an understanding of the current generation of students (Westerman, 2007). The literature refers to a number of unique characteristics and traits that relate to the current generation of students. Such characteristics and traits include being:

- **Empowered.** Students from the current generation tend to be much more empowered at home. They are allowed to speak their mind, question authority and make decisions for themselves. This state of affairs creates the understanding with these students that they can conduct themselves similarly in the classroom among their peers and towards their lecturers (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Twenge, 2009:399).
- **Technologically inclined.** The heavy influence of technology is vital to understanding the current generation (Collins & Tilson, 2001:174; Westerman, 2007; Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Trent, 2010:13; Twenge, 2013:66). The current generation have grown up with technology (Westerman, 2007; Kane, 2014; McGrath, 2014, Morgan, 2014:36). They do not think of a time without cell phones, computers and the internet (Westerman, 2007). They rely greatly on technology to communicate and complete tasks. They are used to communicating via e-mail, text messaging and various social media sites, in actual fact avoiding face-to-face and personal interaction. These mediums of communication, such as SMS, BBM, WhatsApp and e-mail are instant and fast. Everyone is always reachable. This is the kind of communication these students

are used to; therefore, they expect the same fast communication and availability from their lecturers (Anon, 2014a; Kane, 2014, McGrath, 2014).

- **Achievement-oriented.** Kane (2014) explains that the parents of the Millennials, the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were taught that children must be seen and not heard. The Baby Boomers were not empowered as young people, and in an attempt “not [to] repeat the mistakes of the previous generation” they are now doing what is being termed “over parenting” (McGrath, 2014), resulting in a confident, ambitious, self-liking and achievement-oriented child. These students (the Millennials) have been nurtured, pampered and from a young age have received praise for everything they achieve, causing them to be very assertive with a sense of entitlement (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Twenge, 2009:398; McGrath, 2014). They also have very high expectations of themselves and also expect their lecturers, and eventually their employers, to meet these expectations (Twenge, 2009:398; Kane, 2014, Zepke *et al.*, 2014).
- **Team-oriented.** The current generation of students value teamwork and actively seek the affirmation and input of others. In a team environment they tend to be loyal and committed with a great need to be involved and included (Kane, 2014; McGrath, 2014).
- **In need of constant feedback.** Since the students from the current generation are used to receiving constant praise and feedback from their parents, they also expect this from their lecturers. They want to be informed of what is going on, they want to receive feedback on work they have submitted and they expect to be praised for their efforts, even if they have not made much effort (Westerman, 2007; Kane, 2014). Kane (2014) suggests that these students might benefit greatly from a mentorship programme where they have someone who will act as a sounding board and who will give them feedback and guidance.
- **Instantly gratified.** Students from the current generation have developed expectations for immediate fulfilment as they have been influenced by the internet which makes vast amounts of information available at the click of a button, instant messaging which connects them to anyone in a matter of seconds

and social media sites, such as Facebook, for connecting with others and sharing information (Westerman, 2007; McGrath, 2014).

- **Prone towards selective attention.** The current generation of students are surrounded by and bombarded with media and information. They have therefore learned to pay attention only to what is relevant to them; or rather, what they think is relevant to them. One result of this is a short attention span as they lose interest and stop paying attention as soon as they decide something is not relevant or important to them (Westerman, 2007).

Institutions and academic staff may need to take these characteristics and traits into consideration in their curricula and teaching. Failing to do so may result in large gaps between the different generations as represented by students and staff. The following sections will thus focus on what these changes mean for higher education and the educators who are expected to assist these students in enhancing the potential for success in their learning.

2.3.2 The challenges presented by the current generation

Since the current generation of students are overwhelmed with and over-stimulated by information and media, they have become sceptical towards information and often tend to question the validity of such information (Westerman, 2007). They also tend to question authority as they see themselves as well-equipped and well-informed. Negative characteristics that have been used to describe the current generation include narcissism, arrogance, impatience, incuriosity and being unmotivated (Westerman, 2007; McGrath, 2014). These students are often difficult to approach as they are not necessarily willing to adapt to the environment they find themselves in, but rather expect the environment to adapt to them (Westerman, 2007). They are also likely to quit a task if they become uninterested or feel that they cannot complete it (Westerman, 2007). These traits can have serious negative effects on a student's educational experiences and performance, therefore, it seems vital that educators address and manage such challenges and come up with ways to interest and teach the current generation more effectively. The next section focusses on this issue.

2.3.3 The benefits of the current generation

Although the challenges discussed in the preceding section create a gloomy picture of the current student generation, there are benefits to consider as well. Students of the current generation are assertive and not afraid or reluctant to speak their minds and they have good reasoning ability (Twenge, 2009:398). They project self-confidence and optimism (McGrath, 2014), are goal-driven and think creatively to find solutions to problems. They are not afraid to take risks and assert themselves when they have made a decision. They can also multitask and easily connect with others (Westerman, 2007). Due to the fact that the current generation of students have grown up in a diverse and rapidly changing environment (Anon, 2014a; Morgan, 2014:36), they are much more accepting of others with a less stringent focus on differences in race, sexual orientation and religion (McGrath, 2014).

2.3.4 How to teach the current generation

In view of the millennial characteristics discussed in the preceding sections it may be said that educators cannot expect to address the current generation of students in the traditional ways teaching has always been conducted (Anon, 2014a). Students cannot be expected to live in this fast-paced, technologically-driven, information-overloaded, media saturated environment every day and then to function differently in the classroom than they do everywhere else.

Westerman (2007) suggest a number of strategies to educators in higher education to address the changing needs and specific demands of the current generation. These include characteristics of teaching that demonstrate the following:

- **Variety.** The current generation enjoys multitasking (Anon, 2014a). They want to be engaged and involved and at times, even entertained. They do not merely want to observe, they want to take part actively and deliver a meaningful input. Means of facilitating this predisposition in the classroom includes, but is not limited to, working on case studies, class debates and using technology to solve problems. These methods allow students to draw from a variety of skills and cognitive levels and require of them to become involved and apply themselves.

- **Significance.** The current generation will be unwilling to participate in activities if they do not feel that they are meaningful or important. Educators must therefore clearly explain the reasoning behind a task or activity. It is very useful to link the classroom theory to real-life examples or scenarios to demonstrate to these students why it is necessary for them to obtain certain information. Games and simulations are also useful tools to authenticate the facts (Anon, 2014a).
- **Autonomy.** The current generation is encouraged to express themselves and be comfortable within themselves from a young age. They therefore want to express their individuality in their work. Within limits, educators should allow students to do this. Educators may also consider varying their teaching methods and techniques as the current generation do not necessarily appreciate a one-size-fits-all teaching style; they enjoy classes that are flexible and fun where they can voice their meaning in a comfortable environment Westerman (2007).
- **Feedback.** The current generation crave high rates of reinforcement to motivate them. They want to be kept informed and up to date through constant feedback. Educators may create many opportunities to provide students with feedback such as tests, activities and presentations Westerman (2007).

It seems clear that the current generation of students do not want to be passive learners sitting in a classroom with someone lecturing to them; they want to be engaged during classes and provided with active learning experiences. Learner-centred classroom environments are preferred (Hallinger & Lu, 2013:605; Anon, 2014a; Zepke *et al.*, 2014) and educators have to "... approach the classroom with new and inventive ways to impart learning" (Anon, 2014a). It is not necessary to abandon traditional teaching styles entirely, but the styles must be adapted to better suit the needs and demands of the current generation of students. One way of doing this is through engaging students better in their own learning (Fletcher, 2014).

In view of the characteristics and challenges posed by the current generation of students, teaching these students may appear to be a daunting task. However, instead of becoming intimidated by such challenges one may rather focus on finding means to account for these challenges and to effectively assist active student learning. Since student engagement has been identified as a possible means to

address the complex and changing needs of the current generation of students, the following section focuses on the concept of student engagement in terms of what it is, why it is important and how it may be better accomplished.

2.4 Conceptualising student engagement

Student engagement is not an easy concept to define due to its complex and varied nature (Garrett, 2011:2; Fletcher, 2014, Zepke *et al.*, 2014). Yet, critics are concerned about the lack of student engagement (Fletcher, 2014) and therefore investigation of the topic and how to promote it is the order of the day (Coates, 2010). Different views on student engagement may be found in various literature (Zepke *et al.*, 2014) and some of these views will be discussed here in order to create a holistic view of the concept of student engagement. Simply put, one may identify with the view of Zepke *et al.* (2014), who define engagement as students' cognitive investment in, active participation in and emotional commitment to learning. Cruce *et al.* (2008:540) also provide a wider perspective by defining student engagement as academic achievement, involvement in educational activities, satisfaction, acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives and post- higher education performance. Strydom *et al.* (2010:261) explain that two key components are important to consider when defining student engagement as each of these two components has a different focus. The first focusses on the student and how much time the student spends on academic activities and the second component focusses on the higher education institution and how it aligns its resources with learning opportunities to foster student engagement. These two components must operate in conjunction in order for effective and efficient student engagement to occur. In a study by Garrett (2011:3), specifically for the purpose of defining student engagement, key words or phrases such as "active involvement", "active participation", "fully immersed in the topic", "thinking critically and creatively and sharing ideas" and "enthusiasm" were prominent. Fletcher (2014:1) adds that student engagement refers to "... students' willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in and be successful in the learning process".

Some other definitions of student engagement include the one by Smith *et al.* (2005:1) who quote the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE, 2003) when defining student engagement as "... the frequency with which students participate in activities that represent effective education practice". Smith *et al.* (2005:1) add to their definition by stating student engagement "... comprises of students' involvement in a variety of activities" and they add that engagement is not limited to what students may learn from educators, but also what they learn from each other. Strydom *et al.*'s (2010:261) definition corresponds with the previously mentioned as they define student engagement as "...students devoting their time to educationally purposeful activities". Even though these definitions provide a broad perspective and capture the essence of student engagement to a certain degree, there is much more to the concept.

To further elucidate the concept of student engagement, Van Uden *et al.* (2013:44) explain that there are two basic components of student engagement, namely emotional engagement and behavioural engagement. It is important to draw a distinction between these two components and understand each one as they are interrelated and since the one can have an adverse effect on the other. Emotional engagement refers to students' 'feeling of belonging' in the classroom. Students may be considered emotionally engaged if they are enthusiastic, interested in classroom topics and display a positive learning attitude. Behavioural engagement refers mainly to students' participation. Students are behaviourally engaged if they participate in the classroom, arrive for class on time and do what is expected of them, including completing assignments. Educators must be aware of both these components so they may assist in whichever one might be lacking at particular times.

Other literature points to various types of student engagement which include the following (Anon, 2014b):

- **Intellectual engagement.** Students want the topics they learn about to be stimulating. Chances of this happening are much more likely when students are interested in the topics at hand. Where possible, educators can put the power in the students' hands and let them decide which topics to discuss and when.

- **Emotional engagement.** It is inevitable that students will bring certain emotions or feelings with them into the learning environment. Should these emotions be negative, the students' concentration and ultimately their learning will be hampered; therefore, educators should aim to support students who display negative emotions through counselling or peer mentoring. Students will respond positively if educators take a sincere interest in them by interacting with them and finding out how they feel about matters related to their education, among other things.
- **Behavioural engagement.** Students can tell us how they feel by their body language or behaviour. Educators will pick up on cues that students are disengaged, and it is important to act on such cues. Educators may change the structure of the lesson or even the classroom by for example moving seats into a circle for class discussion. Students tend to become bored with a rigid routine and boredom will lead to disengagement. Therefore variation, novelty and physical activity can improve students' learning.
- **Physical engagement.** The term 'kinesthetic learning' refers to learning that occurs when students are physically moving around and taking part in activities. Physical activity can stimulate learning interest and eliminate fidgeting or distraction, especially when implemented at short intervals during a lesson. Another aspect to consider is whether students are physically comfortable when they are in the learning environment; for example, have they had something to eat? Are they hot or cold? Are they ill? Any one of these factors can distract a student from learning, therefore higher education institutions should account for these factors where possible by for example providing subsidised meals, making sure classrooms are at a comfortable temperature and possibly on-campus medical services.
- **Social engagement.** Students are socially inclined and would mostly perceive social interaction in the classroom favourably. Dividing students into groups where they are expected to work together to complete a task or assignment, forming debate teams or hosting friendly learning contests may be ways to facilitate social engagement.

- **Cultural engagement.** Today, students in our classrooms are from diverse backgrounds and cultures. For students to become engaged in the learning environment it is crucial that they feel welcome, accepted, safe and valued. Educators may modify their lessons to incorporate aspects from the various students' cultures to reduce or even eliminate feelings of confusion, alienation, disconnection or exclusion.

For the purpose of this study, taking into account all the definitions and explanations mentioned in this section, it appeared to be meaningful to isolate at least one definition of student engagement as a working definition. Therefore, for this study the operational definition of student engagement as proposed by Henning (2012) was taken as "... the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college" (Henning, 2012:15).

Along with some understanding of the concept of student engagement comes the daunting thought that engaging an increasingly diverse student body is a challenging task (Wyatt, 2011). Therefore one needs to consider the motivation behind student engagement.

2.4.1 The relevance of student engagement

Many researchers maintain that there is a positive relationship between student engagement and student success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004:3; Kuh *et al.*, 2005; Carini *et al.*, 2006:23; Kuh, 2007; Cruce *et al.*, 2008; Nauffal, 2012:173; Hallinger & Lu, 2013:595). As mentioned in section 1.7, student success refers to intellectual competence, sustained interpersonal relationships, personal and identity development, preparedness for career and future, maintained health and wellness, being a socially responsible member of society and respecting diversity (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:352). The concept of student success is discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

Nauffal (2012:173-174) explains that the more students become engaged in their learning, the better they will understand what they are learning and thus they will be more able to deal with complex situations and people from different backgrounds. Considering the issue of a changing higher education landscape, Rich (2006:38)

suggests that ultimately, the restructuring of higher education institutions is necessary to respond effectively to changes and new demands in the higher education environment. Rich (2006:38) also explains that achieving the needed restructuring requires academic leaders with the imagination to recognise new academic possibilities and with the skills and determination to overcome the norms in an attempt to challenge traditional thinking and practice. In order to maintain success of students and sustain competitiveness, higher education institutions must address academic change directly and act accordingly. For this to occur, however, academic leaders must accept the need for structural change and agree on the reallocation of resources (Rich, 2006:45). It is, therefore, crucial that higher education institutions continue to evolve towards fostering learning environments that promote meaningful, powerful and engaging experiences for all students (Fletcher, 2014). Such an environment should result in improved academic performance, persistence, cognitive development, psychological development, moral and ethical development, college adjustment, practical competence, skills transferability and acquisition of social capital (Henning, 2012).

With the mention of change in the higher education environment (Barnett, 2000:3; Newman, 2000:17; Tight, 2003:4; Weber, 2005:990; Leahy, 2012:182; Choudaha, 2013), the focus seems to shift from traditional lecture formats of teaching to new and different ways to communicate and interact with students (Nicolson, 1999:880), for which student engagement may be considered a tool (Reyes *et al.*, 2012). As Kuh (2009:5) observes: “Engagement helps to develop habits of the mind and heart that enlarge [students’] capacity for continuous learning and personal development.” This statement summarises the role of student engagement well, but it may be useful to explore the motivation behind student engagement further.

In order to answer the question of why encouraging student engagement is important I have chosen to take a ‘start with the end in mind’ approach. Whenever considering why something is done, one may consider what the desired outcomes should be. When applying this approach to the engagement question, one should consider the outcomes of effective student engagement. Both Lopez (2011:72) and Reyes *et al.* (2012:700) state that the outcomes of engaged students are students who are

excited about their studies, who are prepared and eager to learn and to promote learning in others around them. This is why the envisaged positive outcomes of active student engagement serve as the first justification for why student engagement should be encouraged.

Kuh (2009:5) also provides a clear motivation of why student engagement is important. He explains that the degree to which students become involved in a subject dictates how much they will know about the subject. The more students interact with and receive feedback from educators, the better they will understand what the subject is all about. At the same time, significant personal development is also established. Smith *et al.* (2005:2) agree that the extent to which students are engaged in their learning is vital to their academic development as well as their personal development and satisfaction (Lewis *et al.*, 2011:249). Engaged students actively seek prompt feedback from educators on their academic performance, thus the importance of giving them the information they need to improve. Engaged students are also willing to become involved in community projects making them responsible citizens, and they often opt to help other students learn (Smith *et al.*, 2005:1).

In a study conducted by Smith *et al.* (2005:11), when educators were asked why they use teaching methods to encourage student engagement, they explained that they did so because engagement promotes cognitive elaboration, enhances critical thinking, promotes social and emotional development, reduces student attrition and facilitates feedback and appreciation of diversity. Other skills emanating from engagement include listening with real skill, building trust in working relationships and leadership skills (Smith *et al.*, 2005:11). Furthermore, student engagement is a distinguishing factor that separates surface learning and deep learning (Garrett, 2011:3). Surface learning is characterised by a focus on rote learning, memorising and reproduction and a lack of reflection (Mann, 2001:7). A deep approach to learning, however, is described as a search for genuine understanding (Geyser, 2004). Deep learning is better achieved through engagement and thus students who are engaged in their learning will learn faster and in greater depth than those who are not engaged (Garrett, 2011:7).

In discussions of why student engagement is important one cannot neglect to mention the major effect exerted by the current generation of students. The differences between the current generation of students and the previous generations as well as the challenges these differences pose is a broad topic. A brief overview of the situation to place it in context and an emphasis on the need for active student engagement may suffice here. Collins and Tilson (2001:172) state that one of the most challenging changes in higher education is the ever-changing nature of the students as a new generation requires new inquiry into their learning behaviour and characteristics. The current generation, referred to as 'the Millennials', is much more empowered at home and they want to have a say in the classroom as well (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Twenge, 2009:399). One may ask whether this means that educators in higher education should adapt their teaching practices to better teach the current generation of students. The agreed answer to this question from the literature studied is an unequivocal 'yes' (Twenge, 2009:399; Cumminskey, 2010:12; Edwards, 2010:13; Hopkins, 2010:12; Ryner, 2010:12; Trent, 2010:13). Student engagement may be considered a suitable means by which to adapt teaching practices to account for the differences of the current generation as Wawrzynski *et al.* (2012) have shown that students who are actively involved demonstrate better academic achievement. Apart from the different characteristics found in the current generation, the diversity of this generation is also reported throughout the literature (Kuh *et al.*, 2011:13), which further highlights the need for engaging learning environments so that all students may be stimulated towards improved learning (Morgan, 2014).

As a final thought for this section, Strydom *et al.* (2010:263) as well as Nelson *et al.* (2012:84) suggest that student engagement is especially beneficial to students who are at risk of failing or dropping out as it increases their motivation to improve and so doing facilitates their success. Students' learning improves when they are inquisitive, interested and inspired (Anon, 2014b). This view is elaborated on in section 2.4.1.1 which focuses specifically on the nature of engaged students as opposed to disengaged students.

One may thus draw the conclusion that student engagement plays a vital role in improving students' learning experiences, may assist in developing well-rounded

individuals and contributes to student success. What follows next is a brief discussion of the difference between students who are engaged and those who are disengaged.

2.4.1.1 Engaged versus disengaged students

Several authors and documents (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Anon, 2014b; Fletcher, 2014) indicate that when students are engaged in their learning experiences they are attracted to their work, they persist even when facing challenges and take delight in their accomplishments. However, students who are disengaged withdraw and show little or no enthusiasm. Students who are engaged will show interest and become involved in learning activities while maintaining a positive demeanour. They apply intense focus and will take action when provided the opportunity. They display positive characteristics such as enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, interest and passion (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Anon, 2014b; Fletcher, 2014). Disengaged students display different behaviour such as being absent from class, cheating on assessments and even vandalism. These students are passive; they do not apply themselves; they are often bored, depressed or anxious about being in a classroom and tend to give up easily when presented with a challenge. Rebellion towards educators is also common among disengaged students (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Fletcher, 2014). Educators must be aware that students will not be engaged if they are not interested by or absorbed in learning environments. They will find something else that interests them instead, leading to them losing out on valuable learning time. Educators must thus attempt to get students focussed and eager right from the start of any learning opportunity – something which is by no means easy (De Frondeville, 2009). Having established the motivation of student engagement as discussed in this section, the next aim was to find out how student engagement may be facilitated.

2.4.2 How to facilitate student engagement

Getting students to engage in meaningful educational practices is not easy. It stems from a combination of factors involving both students and educators. Research does indicate, however, that when educators encourage engagement it does have a meaningful effect on students (Laird, Smallwood, Niskodè-Dossett & Garver,

2009:73). Before discussing strategies on facilitating student engagement, one might first ask the question, who is responsible for making sure student engagement occurs? Many authors agree that although educators play a major role, effective student engagement is ultimately a shared responsibility between educators and students (Cruce *et al.*, 2008:541; Henning, 2012; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012; Strom & Strom, 2013:54; Zepke *et al.*, 2014). However, considering the role of educators in student engagement it may be useful to examine their behaviour and how it can influence engagement. Educators who encourage engagement are welcoming, supportive of learning, facilitate students' learning collaboratively and respect the diversity of students. Educators must also be knowledgeable in their field, as students' engagement is influenced by their perception of the educator's effectiveness; furthermore, educators should be available for consultation and helpful when needed (Zepke *et al.*, 2014). Hallinger and Lu (2013) emphasise the importance of making sure engagement practices challenge students in order to stimulate them and improve learning. While discussing various strategies from the literature on how to facilitate student engagement, it is important to remember that students differ and therefore what engages students differs. Educators should read their audiences and be equipped with the knowledge on how to alternate their engagement practices to meet different personalities in their classrooms (Zepke, *et al.*, 2014). Hallinger and Lu (2013:595) stress the importance of creating opportunities for students to engage with the real world by applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations as optimal learning takes place in these situations. Fletcher (2014) identified five indicators of student engagement, namely the level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, interaction between students and academic staff, enriching educational experiences, and supportive learning environments. Many scholars in higher education agree that it is the responsibility of the educators to facilitate engagement both in and outside of the classrooms (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:48; Johnson, 2012; Fletcher, 2014). For this to happen, educators should be clear in their instructions so that students will know what is expected of them. This approach creates a safe and secure environment in which students can freely engage and apply themselves. Providing clear and constructive feedback will also strengthen the process of engagement (Fletcher, 2014; Zepke *et al.*, 2014). Since educators play such a vital role in facilitating engagement it is critical that a positive

relationship of trust exists between students and educators. It is also important for such a relationship to exist among students themselves since it would make them feel free to voice their opinions and actively take part in learning activities. Educators may use a variety of teaching approaches and strategies to enhance the opportunities for students to engage with the learning material and one another (Fletcher, 2014); for students to engage they need to be active and required to do something with the knowledge and/or skills they recently obtained. The ideal situation may be for educators to create learning environments that make it difficult for students not to participate (De Frondeville, 2009; Johnson, 2012).

De Frondeville (2009) identified the following 10 steps to get and keep students engaged in their learning:

- **Start class with a mind warm-up.** A good way to get students thinking at the beginning of a lesson is to give them some kind of problem to solve. They can be divided into groups and given a problem or material containing mistakes where they have to solve the problem or identify all the mistakes. The group who finishes first can put up their hands and some form of recognition and/or reward may be given.
- **Use movement to get students focussed.** Physical movement at intervals throughout a lesson can help students to regain focus. It can be something as simple as instructing students to move their chairs around to sit in groups or they can be asked to enact or perform some skill they recently acquired.
- **Teach students how to collaborate.** Before expecting students to work together it may be useful to teach them the fundamentals of teamwork. This can be done by facilitating a simple activity that will require students to work together, which does not have to be subject-related. While half of the class is completing the teamwork activity the other half can stand around with a teamwork rubric detailing the desired norms and behaviours. In so doing students will be able to identify behaviour which both promotes and hinders effective teamwork to be applied in their own collaborative learning experiences.

- **Use writing for reflection.** When educators see students losing interest or when students are disorderly after a group work session, they can use reflective writing to regain the students' focus. Educators can instruct students to take a few minutes to put their thoughts about the topic to paper. Students can then pair up and discuss their thoughts with each other or the educator can take in the writings to be assessed formally.
- **Be strict when giving instructions.** It is important for educators to make sure that students understand instructions. Before giving instructions the educator should make sure there is total silence and that students are giving full attention. Hold students accountable for listening attentively by informing them that the instructions will not be repeated.
- **Be fair to keep students thinking.** To be fair when asking students for answers in the classroom, educators can put students' names in a hat and draw a name when a question is asked. In this way students may be asked to contribute at any time, which should make them concentrate more so that they are ready with an answer when asked.
- **Direct a question to all.** Instead of asking a question to one student the educator can ask a question and then go from one student to the next expecting an answer from everyone. In so doing students will also need to pay attention all the time.
- **Use minimal supervision tasks to eliminate dead time.** Various instances in the classroom can lead to dead time, for example handing out test papers or handling unforeseen interruptions. In order to eliminate dead time educators can give instructions that would require minimal supervision, for example by asking them to do reflective writing or read a section in the textbook.
- **Use various teaching styles.** Educators must move from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:363). Using different styles of teaching in one lesson might be more strenuous for the educator, but will certainly keep students more interested.

- **Create teamwork tactics that emphasise accountability.** Students should be encouraged to seek assistance from each other before simply turning to the educator for the answers. The 'ask-three-before-me' strategy is quite successful in this regard which entails students first consulting at least three peers about their uncertainties and only if they are still unsure, then ask the educator.

Wolpert-Gawron (2012) also gives an account of how students view engagement and what they see as engaging them:

- **Working with peers.** Students are inherently social creatures. They want to interact and have reported that talking with peers over a topic clarifies their understanding and broadens their perspectives.
- **Working with technology.** Students use technology in their everyday lives; they rely on it for various tasks and aspects of their lives. Therefore educators cannot eliminate technology from the classroom entirely. Students enjoy tasks that require them to utilise technology such as blogging, creating a newsletter or posting on social media.
- **Connecting the real world to the work.** Students want to be able to see and understand the relevance of a topic or lesson. Therefore linking the topic with real-life examples or scenarios will help students understand and get them to become engaged.
- **Passionate educators.** Students will become bored with a topic if it seems as if the educator him-/herself is not really interested. Delivering the lesson in an enthusiastic and passionate way will make students want to listen and engage more and may even get them equally excited about the topic.
- **Physical movement.** Students do not want to sit in a classroom. They enjoy moving around and actively taking part in activities. If they are given the opportunity to do this their concentration will improve and they will become more engaged.

- **Visuals.** Students like to see pictures as these give them a mental image and clarify their understanding. They do not prefer something like PowerPoint slides with too much text or bullet points.
- **Student choice.** When students are able to choose their topics or methods of completing tasks they have more scope for creativity. This approach allows them to play at their strengths which will motivate them to work harder and perform well.
- **Understanding of students.** Students do not want to be treated as such. They value it when educators ask their opinion and sincerely try to find out what they like and enjoy. Students will be more engaged when they feel they are in a partnership with their educators.
- **Use variety.** Students do not always enjoy routine and rigid behaviour. They want to be exposed to a variety of teaching styles and topics to remain engaged.
- **Recognise differences.** Students appreciate it when educators recognise them as individuals with different preferences who are perhaps engaged differently from their peers.

As a further means to exercise student engagement, Pike, Kuh and McCormick (2011:300) suggest learning communities as a positive link between student engagement and learning success (also see Kuh, 2007). Such communities consist of a cohort of students who take two or more courses together and who work and study together. Learning communities are associated with various educational benefits such as help with transition from high school to higher education, better academic performance, higher satisfaction, student persistence and more tolerance for diversity. These positive aspects of learning communities do, however, differ from one student to the next and from one institution to another.

Hallinger and Lu (2013:596) have also identified specific teaching methods that may be effective for facilitating student success. These include problem-based learning, case teaching and simulation. Students are motivated to engage when they are presented with a problem and asked to come up with a solution in their own way, especially if these are problems they may encounter in their workplace in future.

One final thought on facilitating student engagement is that of the increased diversity in educators' classrooms (Kranstuber *et al.*, 2011:45; Morgan, 2014:34) and how engagement accounts for the diversity factor (Kuh, 2008b:27). Different students learn differently and experience the learning process in different ways; therefore, if they are given instructions that match their needs and strengths, they are likely to perform better (Morgan, 2014:34). Student engagement allows for differentiated instruction, a style of teaching that recognises student differences and acts on their strengths and talents, and that is specifically designed to meet the needs of diverse learners (Morgan, 2014:34; Patterson, 2014). When implementing differentiated instruction, three approaches to teaching make it very effective: emphasising student interest, using the right starting point and allowing students to work at their own pace.

In this section (2.4.2) it has been pointed out that the educator's behaviour in the classroom and towards her/his students in general has an impact on how successful student engagement may be. For facilitation of student engagement to be useful, one should be able to assess whether teaching has indeed been successful in engaging students. This aspect is dealt with next.

2.4.3 Assessing student engagement

If student engagement is to improve student success, it is important to establish measures to assess engagement practices (Henning, 2012). It may, however, prove difficult for educators to monitor whether their attempts at promoting student engagement are being perceived in a positive light and therefore are successful. Educators often use informal assessments of student engagement such as taking an attendance register, observing students' behaviour or facial expressions in class, and providing feedback on tasks and assignments, which allows educators to judge how engaged students are in their academic work (Laird *et al.*, 2009:71). Koljatic and Kuh (2001:352) explain that there are various challenges when it comes to developing valid and reliable outcome indicators highlighting the often high development costs, lack of consensus on desired outcomes, difficulties with defining outcome indicators and the absence of clear connections between indicators and actions that institutions could take to improve student success.

The ideal situation would be to have process indicators that closely link with desired outcomes, which can be used as diagnostic assessment to indicate to what degree students are engaged with certain learning activities (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:352). Fletcher (2014) suggests using self-reporting techniques such as surveys, questionnaires, checklists and rating scales (Carini *et al.*, 2006:1). Carini *et al.* (2006:2) state that student self-reports are valid and reliable tools to assess student engagement if the following six conditions are met: (1) the information requested is known to the respondents; (2) the questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously; (3) the questions refer to recent activities; (4) the respondents think the questions merit a thoughtful response; (5) the information requested is potentially verifiable; and (6) the question asks for information that is known to those answering the questions and does not threaten, embarrass or violate their privacy. A simple and immediate means of assessing student engagement is by observing students' behaviour in the classroom. If engagement is being successfully facilitated students will be alert, making eye contact and paying attention, taking notes, listening, asking questions, responding to questions, and otherwise reacting. Educators will soon enough know if students are not engaged and should they pick up on such cues they must adjust their instruction and try to get students engaged (Johnson, 2012).

Laird *et al.* (2009) stress the importance of academic staff's involvement in formal and informal assessment of student engagement. They describe four roles academic staff can play in assessing student engagement. These roles are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Roles of academic staff in the assessment of student engagement

Role of academic staff	Role summary
Source of data	Information can be collected from academic staff about their observations of students, the importance they place on aspects of student engagement and the practices they use to encourage student engagement.
Audience	Assessment findings should be presented to academic staff through multiple avenues including reports, meetings, lectures and workshops.

Data analyst	Academic staff with expertise in data analysis can assist their institution's investigations that use assessment data.
Beneficiary of assessment knowledge	The knowledge derived from assessment processes should be used to inform the development and adaptation of campus programmes including those aimed at improving academic staff understanding and instructional practice.

(Source: Laird *et al.*, 2009:72)

Student engagement appears to be a powerful instrument for fostering student success. Laird *et al.* (2009) suggest that the degree to which students engage in meaningful learning activities may be a reflection of the higher education institution's quality, making it all the more important to assess engagement practices to determine how the institution is doing. Should areas of lack be identified, resources may be focussed towards improvement. From Laird *et al.*'s (2009) research it seems that obtaining feedback from academic staff and students is very important for assessing student engagement since it will enable the institution to see what engagement practices educators value and whether students respond equally positively to these practices. As institutions progress in the assessment of student engagement and gain more experience they will eventually have a wealth of knowledge which can inform improvement and the development of academic staff.

As indicated by the research question, the aim of this study was to discover how student engagement is being promoted at TPHS to enhance the possibilities for student success. So far this chapter has focussed on the current generation and how to engage them, but the following section addresses the concept of student success.

2.5 Conceptualising student success

Currently there are many references to what constitutes student success (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:44) as it is considered to be the heart of an educational institution (Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.*, 2013:247). It is therefore important to understand what promotes student success, especially since, as explained by Kuh (2007), students today deal with various factors and circumstances that challenge their ability to succeed. There

are various definitions of student success as a result of different perspectives taken on the construct. While previous conceptions mostly considered academic success, student success currently refers more to the whole student and is multidimensional, going beyond cognitive or academic success alone (AACU, 2006; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012). Student success includes intellectual competence, sustained interpersonal relationships, personal and identity development, preparedness for career and future, maintained health and wellness, being a socially responsible member of society and being respectful of diversity (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:352; AACU, 2006; Cruce *et al.*, 2008:540). Sedlacek (2004, cited in Wawrzynski *et al.* (2012) adds that non-cognitive variables of student success include positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, successfully handling the system, preference for long-term goals, availability of a strong support person, leadership experience, community involvement and knowledge acquired in the field. This revised conception of what student success entails may have stemmed from a greater understanding of the various intellectual, emotional, behavioural, physical and social factors that influence students' learning processes in the present era.

To understand student success and put it into perspective for the rest of the study, the definition provided in section 1.7 will serve as the operational definition for this study. It is thus proposed that student success includes intellectual competence, sustained interpersonal relationships, personal and identity development, preparedness for career and future, maintained health and wellness, being a socially responsible member of society and being respectful of diversity (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001:352). In the next section factors which may be predictors of student success are considered.

2.5.1 Predictors of student success

In the past, academic results have been the most commonly used predictor of student success (Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.*, 2013:249). Other factors that relate to student success include students' demographics and whether they are first-generation students of their families (Kuh, 2007). While these external factors are very important to consider, internal psychological traits, such as motivation, self-confidence, perceived support and emotional impact are equally important.

Psychological factors are considered critical to the success of a student in higher education. Krumrei-Mancuso (2013:250-252) lists the following six psychological factors that relate to and may be considered predictors of student success:

- **Academic self-efficiency.** Students' belief in their ability to complete a task successfully will determine the effort expended. Students with positive self-efficiency will be less stressed and perform better academically. For students with low self-efficiency, institutions can find role models, and provide encouragement, support and positive feedback, especially when performing in areas with low self-efficiency. Such students may be taught in smaller units to be mastered before moving on to a next unit. Goal setting can be very effective to manage students with low self-efficiency. Students may document their success to observe their own progress, which may lead to increased motivation.
- **Organisation and attention to study.** Proper time management among students is considered to have better academic performance and satisfaction as a result, especially if students set goals and prioritise, plan and schedule their work, exercise control over their time and feel positive about being organised.
- **Stress and time management.** Students with high stress levels tend to be less satisfied and motivated. Students should be encouraged to focus on their ability to respond to time pressure and academic demand without becoming overwhelmed and without procrastinating.
- **Involvement with college activity.** The physical and psychological energy that students devote to their academic experience includes studying, spending time on campus, active participation in student organisations and interacting with educators and peers.
- **Emotional satisfaction with academics.** Students with poor emotional health, perhaps struggling with depression or anxiety, are likely to perform poorly academically.
- **Class communication.** Class participation is an important aspect of student success. It may be encouraged by educators with a relatively small amount of effort, at least compared to other engagement practices.

External predictors of student success as mentioned at the beginning of this section may be considered important to best guide students at the beginning of their studies, but the six internal psychological factors listed above are also important and should be taken into account. Not all these factors are equally easy to measure and monitor, but doing so may prove beneficial to students and their success.

2.5.2 Factors that have an impact on student success

A clear distinction has been drawn between non-cognitive skills (motivation, interest, curiosity, responsibility, determination, perseverance, attitude, work habits, self-regulation and social skills) and cognitive skills (positive academic performance, assessment results, information recall and skill acquisition) that influence student success (Anon, 2014b). Zepke *et al.* (2014) identify family, social, cultural and personal factors as matters that have an impact on student success. Reyes *et al.* (2012) add that the emotional connections students cultivate with educators and peers will greatly affect their success (Morgan, 2014:35). Furthermore, Jacoby (1989) noted earlier that student success may be influenced when students commute to class instead of staying in on-campus residences. Students are more likely to be successful in their education if educators meet their needs of relatedness, competence and autonomy (Reyes *et al.*, 2012). Kranstuber *et al.* (2011:45) indicate factors associated with college student success as teacher immediacy, student motivation, teaching methods and affinity seeking. Laird *et al.* (2009:73) state that for students to develop holistically, they must be engaged in activities such as collaborating with peers, both in and outside the classroom, interacting with academic staff regarding academic performance and career planning, reading and writing at a collegiate level, spending significant time on academic tasks, participating in learning communities and having serious conversations with peers from different backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, Kuh (2007) contends that students today face many challenges that can hinder their success. Such challenges include, but are not limited to, socioeconomic background, financial means, college readiness and support from family. Many students also work while earning their qualifications, which may also have an impact on their probability of success.

When discussing student success, one cannot do so without mentioning the effect that personal life, specifically relationships with family and friends, has on their success. Kranstuber *et al.* (2012:44) found that “memorable messages” from parents to students, keeping perceptions of the message and sender characteristics in mind, are significant predictors of students’ cognitive learning, learner empowerment, motivation and satisfaction. There is said to be a direct correlation between a student’s family characteristic and graduation rates as parents’ behaviour plays a vital role in their child’s academic success. Educators may aim to understand how parents’ messages to their children influence their behaviour, values and perspectives. Parents may also be encouraged to be involved in their children’s education as active parental involvement has been shown to result in improved academic performance. It is important to take note of the indicators of student success as mentioned by Kranstuber *et al.* (2012:44):

- **Cognitive learning.** In class, educators will monitor cognitive learning by students asking questions, volunteering for tasks or activities and discussing course content with others. These actions are positively associated with cognitive learning, even more so when students discuss course content and other matters related to academics with family members and friends.
- **Learner empowerment.** Students’ feeling of motivation and control over their academic tasks in relation to cognitive and affective learning is considered to be learner empowerment. Interpersonal communication is said to be the driving force behind learner empowerment as this communication gives students a better understanding of their life experiences. Advice from parents, for example, helps students overcome difficulties, thus they become empowered.
- **Motivation.** Students’ motivation has a major impact on their success, as a highly motivated student will work harder and achieve better results. Educator communication and behaviour greatly influence student motivation and therefore ultimately student success. Parents’ behaviour and involvement also greatly influence students’ motivation and performance.
- **Satisfaction.** Students’ satisfaction with their tertiary education experience is dependent on a variety of factors, such as quality of teaching, campus

involvement and motivation. It is important to foster a feeling of satisfaction with students as this will lead to better academic performance, student growth and retention, which is vital to a higher education institution's success.

Considering all the factors that potentially have an impact on student success, it is important for higher education institutions to be able to determine whether their students are in fact achieving success and what role student engagement may play in such success.

2.5.3 Determining student success

To determine whether students are indeed successful in their academic and development efforts, Mullin (2012:137) suggests considering the following areas: analytical reasoning, critical thinking, communication, innovative and creative thinking, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork and collaborative skills, global understanding, citizenship and career-specific skills and knowledge. Whitt, Kinzie, Schuh and Kuh (2008) suggest that the Inventory for Student Engagement and Success (ISES) is a useful tool to obtain information about student success, specifically important for highlighting areas of improvement. Aspects addressed by the ISES include the following:

- **Queries about educational practices.** The ISES will investigate elements to determine how well an institution is using its resources to support student success. Effective educational practices such as level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, interaction between students and academic staff, supporting campus environment and enriching educational experiences are measured.
- **Queries about institutional conditions.** The ISES will look at the institution's mission, in other words the overarching purposes of the institution. It will consider the planned mission compared to the enacted mission to make sure these correlate.
- **Unshakable focus on student learning.** The ISES will determine whether student learning is at the core of the institution's policies, programmes and

practices. Aspects such as timely feedback to students, commitment to student learning and student-to-student interaction will be investigated.

- **Environments adapted for educational enrichment.** The term 'educational environment' refers to all physical and psychological spaces in which students and educators operate. The ISES will determine to what extent such spaces are adapted for teaching and learning, whether facilities are available to students at convenient times, how students describe the campus climate and whether all students have equal access to learning and other resources.
- **Clearly marked pathways to student success.** To encourage students to devote time and energy to activities that foster learning and success, institutions may teach students about institutional values and how to make use of institutional resources while making sure resources are available. The ISES will determine how new students are oriented, whether the level of challenge and support is consistent with student needs and whether policies and practices are in place to identify at-risk students.
- **Improvement-oriented ethos.** Institutions must monitor their progress and implement improvement strategies where and when necessary. The ISES will determine whether innovation and experimentation are encouraged, what data regarding student success are collected and whether budget priorities and allocation are consistent with the educational mission.
- **Shared responsibility for educational quality and student success.** Student learning should be accepted as everyone's responsibility. The ISES will determine to what extent students and their success is a priority for institutional leaders, to what extent other staff members support student success and to what extent students take responsibility for their peers' learning.

Cruce *et al.* (2008:540) state that in order to examine student success thoroughly, higher education institutions must at least consider five variables: (1) student background, including demographics, primary and secondary education and other experiences; (2) structural characteristics of the institution, including mission, size and selectivity; (3) interaction with educators and peers; (4) student perceptions of

the learning environment; and (5) the effort students devote to educationally purposeful activities. Educationally purposeful activities may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Asking questions or contributing to class discussions
- Presenting to peers and educators on a topic
- Preparing drafts of assignments before handing in
- Working with peers on assignments and projects, both in and out of the classroom
- Tutoring other students
- Regular communication with educators
- Discussing career plans with educators
- Interacting with peers from another race or ethnicity

This section has provided potential indicators for student success, and the next section outlines how higher education institutions may help their students to be successful.

2.5.4 How to help students achieve success

In order to help students achieve success, higher education institutions may employ at least four conditions that sustain good practice to endorse student success, as outlined by Kuh *et al.* (2011:14) and supported by other research:

- **Positive restlessness.** Higher education institutions should constantly be improving to find better ways to deliver their mission and educational philosophy. Continuous development of staff and students with set goals for student success will be advantageous. There must be a need for understanding students and trying to actively engage them in the classroom (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:46). Institutions that continuously aim to improve talk about what works well and where changes are necessary, experiment with approaches for improving teaching, adapt promising practices from other institutions, monitor campus information systems and maintain momentum towards positive change (Whitt *et al.*, 2008:9).

- **Data inform decisions.** Should changes be suggested, it is important that such decisions are informed by using good, actionable and reliable data to determine policies, programmes and practices that need to be altered or whether these have the desired effect, in which case alterations will be necessary. Sources of such data may include surveys, academic progress statistics and curriculum evaluations. A portfolio assessment may be created for each course or module on which changes can be based (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:48).
- **Academic and student affairs staff collaborate.** For student success to be a high priority, it is important that clear, open and continuous contact and communication between academic and student affairs staff exist. Information and feedback obtained from students may also be used to inform decisions pertaining to student success.
- **Campus leaders increase the staff committed to student success.** It is important for persons in leadership positions at a higher education institution to drive student success initiatives. They play a vital role making sure that academic staff and students understand the importance of student success and how it is being promoted. These leaders take a holistic perspective on student development and surround themselves with the right people (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:49).

Although these four strategies seem valid and may be effective, time or other constraints may hinder the control methods for student success. Kuh *et al.* (2005:49) suggest that leaders at higher education institutions may assign the duty of monitoring important aspects of student success to one or more individuals. Furthermore, they advise higher education institutions to see challenges as opportunities, cultivate campuses that accommodate differences and avoid work overload. Plenty of focus is also placed on assisting first-year students to succeed as they may be considered highly at risk due to various adjustment and other issues (Dean, 2011). Cruce *et al.* (2008) state that higher education institutions should offer well-designed orientation programmes and first-year seminars, construct learning communities, promote intrusive advising, and provide early warning systems, peer tutoring and mentoring and effective teaching practices.

In view of the accountability of higher education institutions mentioned earlier, it is important that such institutions create rich, engaging classroom experiences that reflect the academic values and accommodate students' preferred teaching and learning styles (Tamblin & Ward, 2006). Tamblin and Ward (2006:62) describe a learning style as how students prefer to learn. Educators must also encourage students to become more involved in campus activities and engage more with peers in view of the aforementioned positive repercussions of active student involvement (Cruce *et al.*, 2008).

Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.* (2013) add that promoting student success involves early identification of student needs with an action plan while psychological learning factors may be considered useful points of intervention. It is important to remember that student success is a shared responsibility between the institution and the student (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004:8). Desirable traits of students include goal-directedness, motivation, self-control and a positive mindset. Educators may try their best to provide challenging goals that encourage students to persist, but ultimately students must also have the will to achieve, believe in themselves and stay focussed (Goodwin & Miller, 2013:74). Goodwin and Miller (2013:75) identify the following three strategies higher education institutions may employ to assist students to be successful: (1) teach students how to achieve goals; (2) explicitly teach growth mindsets; and (3) use out-of-class activities to help students learn to persevere and succeed.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of higher education providers to foster student success (Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.*, 2013:247) and maintain practices that do so. Kuh (2008a) emphasises that institutions must learn what can be done to promote student success and employ leaders who can drive such initiatives. Effective educational practices should enjoy priority and continuous improvement must apply.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter relevant literature concerning the key aspects of the study was discussed. A broad overview was provided of the changing higher education scene, the changing student body, the role of student engagement in addressing the

changing needs of students as well as the possible relationship between student engagement and student success. As stated, the new generation of students, referred to as 'the Millennials' (Collins & Tilson, 2001:172), are very different to their predecessors (Newman, 2000:17; Westerman, 2007; Choudaha, 2013) and therefore they require different approaches to teaching and learning (Twenge, 2009:399; Cumminskey, 2010:12; Edwards, 2010:13; Hopkins, 2010:12; Ryner, 2010:12; Trent, 2010:13). Student engagement has been identified as one such an approach (Fletcher, 2014). Figure 2.1 provides a summary of my understanding, derived from the literature consulted in this chapter, of how student engagement may provide some answer to current higher education teaching challenges. The various elements that make up the diagram below were drawn from the relevant authors mentioned in this chapter. The higher education environment and its changing nature were informed mainly by Barnett (2000), Newman (2000), Tight (2003), Weber (2005), Leahy (2012), Choudaha (2013), Jansen and Taylor (2003), CHE (2004a), Wyatt (2011) and CHE (2013). The current generation and their characteristics were informed mainly by Nicolson (1999), Newman (2000), Choudaha (2013) McGrath (2014) and Anon (2014a). Student engagement was identified in the diagram as one possible answer to many of the challenges presented by the changing higher education environment as well as the challenges presented by the current student generation due to the research of Fletcher (2014) that claims that student engagement is a means of effectively addressing the changing needs of the student body. Student success is portrayed in the diagram as a result of student engagement in view of the research conducted by Kuh *et al.* (2005), Wyatt (2011) and Henning (2012), confirming that student success is likely to be the result of effective student engagement.

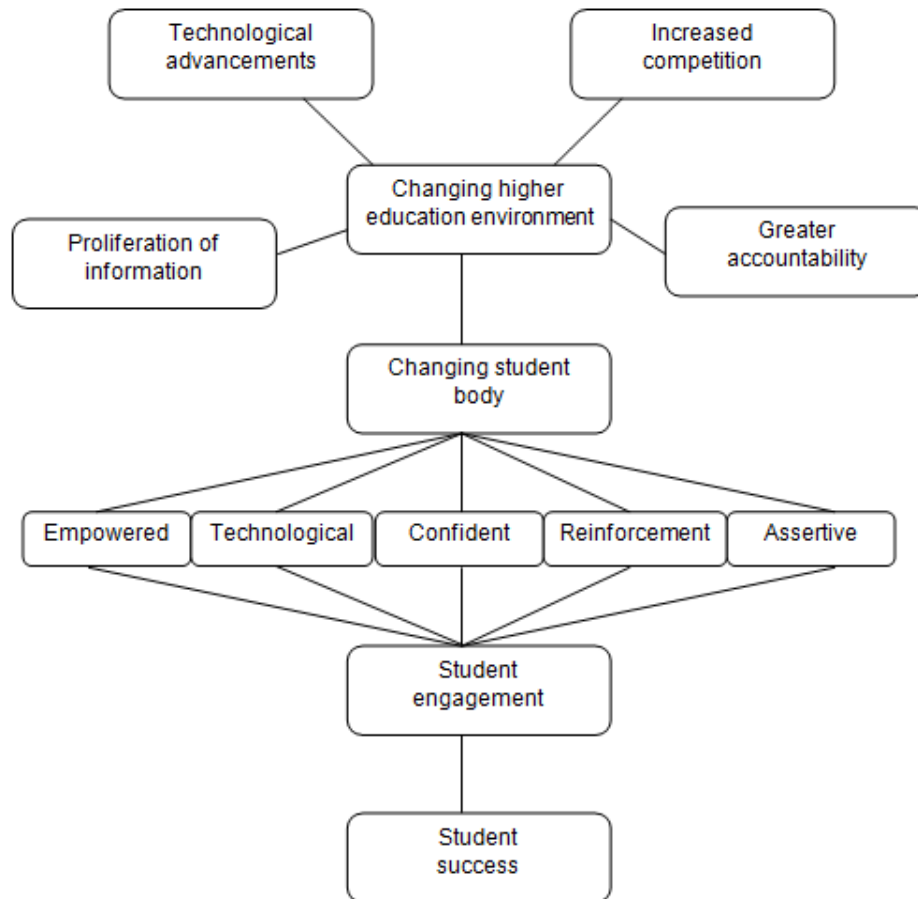


Figure 2.1: The role of student engagement in the current higher education environment

Figure 2.1, which portrays my conceptual understanding of the issue, illustrates how the higher education environment is experiencing changes that include main influential factors such as the proliferation of information, technological advancements, increased competition, increased demands for accountability and a changing student body. Some main characteristics of the changing student body are highlighted as being empowered, technologically inclined, confident, always seeking reinforcement and being assertive. This conceptual framework identifies student engagement as a possible means to address changing needs and facilitate student success.

At the TPHS the effects of the current generation of students as portrayed in the literature is very evident, therefore student engagement as a means of addressing the learning needs of students is institutionally welcomed and encouraged. If higher

education institutions want to make progress in terms of meeting the diverse and demanding needs of this new generation of students, a conscious effort must be made to see the world through their eyes, and to try to understand them and learn from them (Westerman, 2007). Current students are growing up in a fast-paced, daunting environment and they are looking to higher education providers to equip them for their future in such an environment. The task of higher education providers is therefore to employ effective educational practices such as student engagement to foster student success. However, it may take considerable effort to stay focussed on effective educational practices that are linked to student success (Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh *et al.*, 2011). As stated by Morgan (2014) and Patterson (2014), student engagement allows for differentiated instruction, a style of teaching that recognises student differences, and acts on their strengths and talents, specifically designed to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The next chapter addresses the research design methodology employed to empirically investigate student engagement efforts at one private higher education institution, The Private Hotel School.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter contains details of the research design and methodology used for the empirical part of this study. While the previous chapter gave an account of the literature related to the concepts of student engagement and its potential for student success, this chapter explains how student engagement practices at The Private Hotel School (TPHS) were investigated.

From the literature reported in Chapter 2, it is evident that student engagement is a vital component of student learning and is enjoying increased attention and drive worldwide. Student engagement is also positively associated with improved student success. For this reason, the situation at TPHS was examined to determine to what degree, if at all, student engagement practices are being employed and how these practices are perceived by the students of this institution. Being a private higher education provider, TPHS has much accountability towards its various stakeholders, therefore it is essential for this institution to develop well-rounded and professional individuals and graduates. The success and employability of its students is ultimately what enables the school to be successful; therefore information on factors that contribute to student success is crucial for the school.

When conducting research, the researcher views the research process and the data it generates through a particular 'lens'. This lens is often referred to as a research paradigm. A paradigmatic lens provides the researcher with particular views of the world and the subject within the world that is being researched. Creswell (1998:74) defines a paradigm as "... a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide researchers' enquiry". This study was conducted from a pragmatic stance (Plowright, 2011) as the aim of the study, namely to potentially address a material challenge at TPHS, was of a pragmatic nature. The design for this study was Plowright's framework for an integrated methodology (FraIM) which is in essence a mixed methods design. Before discussing the research design of this study, the next

section provides clarification of the chosen research paradigm or ontological and epistemological lens.

3.1.1 Pragmatism as a research paradigm or lens

Pragmatism has been described as an alternative paradigm (Plowright, 2011:182). In contrast to the traditional perspective which argues that there is a difference between knowing something and believing something about the world in which we live, pragmatism entails taking an integrated perspective (Plowright, 2011:182). Pragmatism argues that if statements about knowledge do not lead to consequences, for example decision making or action, then those statements will not count as knowledge. A pragmatist will evaluate the quality of a study based on the intended purpose, the resources available, the procedures followed and the results obtained, all the while keeping in mind the context in which the research was conducted (De Vos, 2005a:359). Pragmatism is focussed on using research methods that are best suited to the research problem and research question, therefore allowing researchers the freedom to use any form of applicable and valid narrative or numeric data, resulting in a mixed method approach (Plowright, 2011). The reasoning behind this is that all methods of data collection have different positives and drawbacks, therefore using a combination of methods may be more ideal (Plowright, 2011). The decision to use a mixed methods approach fitted the study well and allowed me to collect the data to answer the research questions and inform the findings of this study. I could also have considered using an interpretive lens for this study, but then I would have been constrained in terms of using mixed methods. I thus opted for a pragmatist view. In view of the explanation of the lens through which this study was viewed, the following sections address the particulars of data generation and analysis.

3.2 Purpose and aims of the study

TPHS as a private higher education provider has much responsibility towards its students and is accountable to its students' sponsors. The onus is on the school to provide quality education that will result in well-rounded and successful students. Against this backdrop the study was undertaken as student engagement is widely

considered an effective educational strategy that positively relates to student success. In particular, I wanted to determine whether and how, if at all, student engagement activities and opportunities are offered to and facilitated for the students of TPHS. The management and academic staff of TPHS agreed that this may be a valuable study that may inform some institutional changes and improvement. The study was limited to only one private higher education institution (TPHS) as this is where the need was identified and the researcher is based.

3.2.1 Research question

Against the background as sketched in section 1.2 of Chapter 1 and the problem of engaging students in their own learning, the research question posed by this study was as follows:

How, if at all, is student engagement currently employed at The Private Hotel School (TPHS) as a possible strategy to enhance student success?

3.2.1.1 Research sub-questions

In order to answer the main question, four subsidiary questions needed to be answered:

- What does student engagement entail?
- What student engagement practices are currently used by lecturing staff at TPHS?
- What are current students' perceptions of the value of learning engagement at TPHS?
- What possible student engagement strategies may enhance student success at TPHS?

3.2.2 Aim and objectives of the study

In view of the posed research questions the main aim of the study was to explore how, if at all, student engagement is currently employed to enhance student success at The Private Hotel School (TPHS).

The objectives of the study were the following:

- To explore, from a literature perspective, what student engagement entails
- To determine what student engagement practices are currently used by lecturing staff at TPHS
- To determine current students' perceptions of the value of learning engagement at TPHS
- To identify possible strategies whereby student engagement may enhance student success at TPHS

3.3 Research design and methods

A research design, according to Mouton (2001:5, cited in Fouché & De Vos, 2005:132), is a plan of how the research will be conducted. As mentioned, Plowright's (2011) FraIM was used as the design tool for this study. In section 3.3.1 the FraIM is explained and in section 3.3.2 there is a detailed discussion on how this study was conducted based on the FraIM.

3.3.1 The FraIM

As indicated above, an overview of the FraIM is provided here and how this study followed the FraIM is discussed in section 3.3.2. The FraIM's structure is relatively straightforward and yet it has multiple issues that need attention. The FraIM is particularly useful for applying within small-scale empirical investigations of educational and social issues. It contains no content as the content is to be provided by the researcher based on how the study was designed; therefore it is referred to as a framework as it only provides structure (Plowright, 2011). Figure 3.1 illustrates the basic structure of the FraIM which informed the research design for this study.

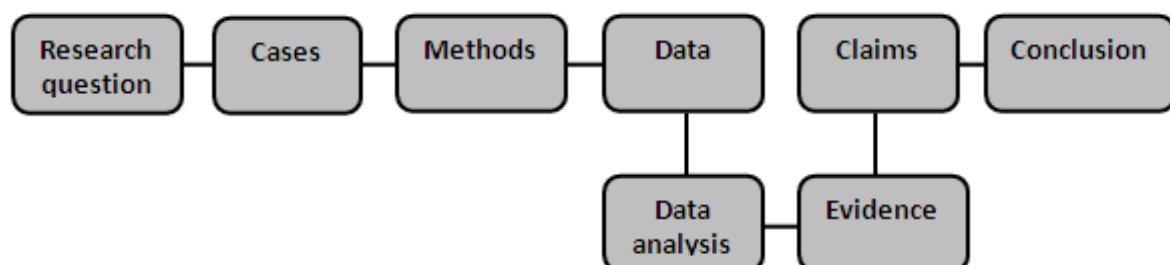


Figure 3.1: The basic structure of the FraIM (Source: Plowright, 2011).

As seen in Figure 3.1, the starting point of the FraIM is the research question. Therefore, once the research question and sub-questions have been established, the cases or participants can be identified. Next the methods of data collection can be decided on as well as the type of data to be collected and how the data will be analysed. Through analysis the data will become the source to support claims made by the researcher and eventually will be able to draw informed and valid conclusions. The FraIM does not require the researcher to hold a particular philosophical position before commencing the research. A more responsive, flexible mindset is encouraged.

Building on the basic structure of the FraIM, Figure 3.2 illustrates the extended version of the FraIM which includes the different elements that make up each component of the basic FraIM. In the next section I discuss how the extended FraIM in Figure 3.2 served as the map guiding the research process for this study.

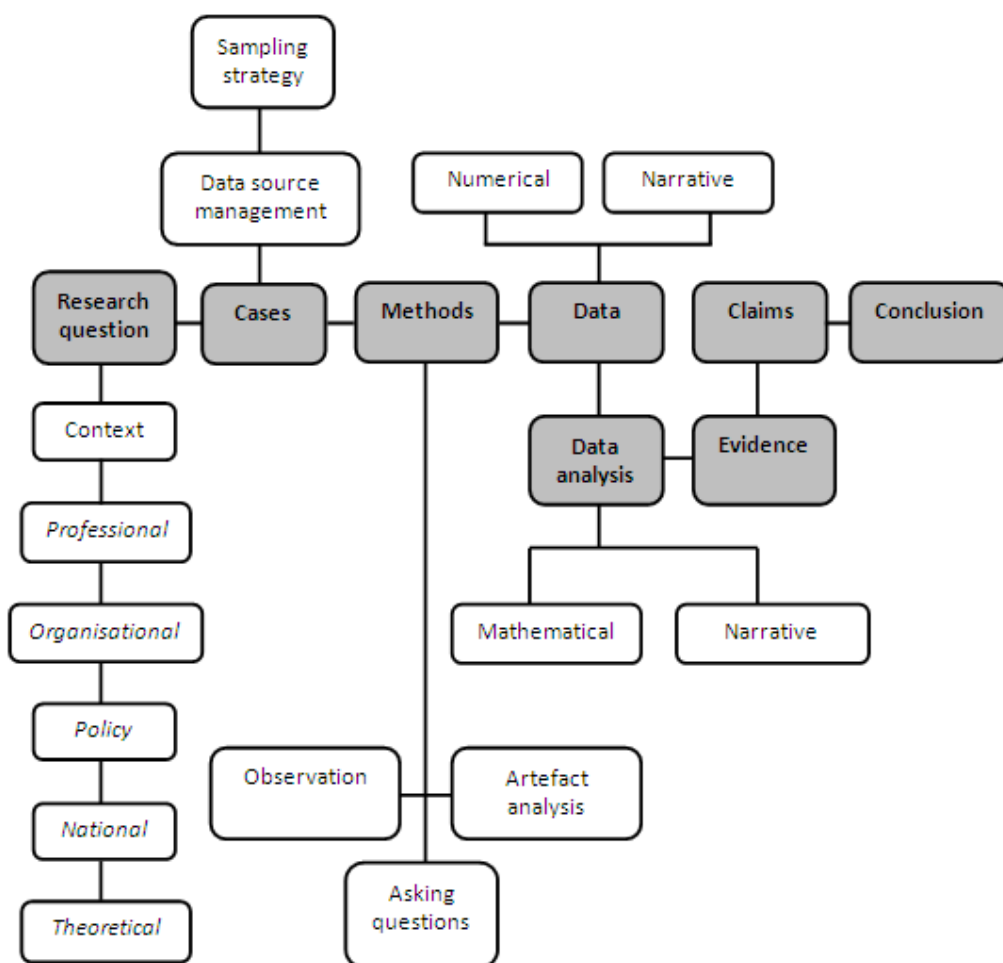


Figure 3.2: The extended FraIM (Source: Plowright, 2011).

3.3.2 Applying the extended FraIM to this study

Each of the eight main elements of the FraIM will be discussed separately to illustrate how Plowright's (2011) extended FraIM served as the base for the research design of this study.

3.3.2.1 The research question

From Figure 3.2 it can be seen that the starting point of the research process, the research question, may be formulated within a number of different contexts. Plowright (2011:8-12) identified five contexts that are contingent to undertaking research, namely professional, organisational, policy, national and theoretical. These contexts merely indicate the type of contexts to be accounted for and one is not necessarily linked to the other.

3.3.2.1.1 Professional context

The professional context provides information about the researcher, including, for example, his/her profession and years of experience. This will assist the readers in placing the research in a personal and professional context while helping them to understand the potential professional perspective that may have been employed for the research. The professional context can also help the readers understand why a research topic was selected as it pertains to the researcher's profession. It is also meant to make the researcher aware of potential biases that may exist about the topic. I, as the researcher, am the academic manager of TPHS. My duties involve lecturing, academic administration and student support. I have been with TPHS since March 2010. Before then I worked in the hospitality industry for approximately two years as well as at another private higher education provider.

3.3.2.1.2 Organisational context

The organisational context refers to the specific organisation at which the research is undertaken. It is important for the reader to understand the organisational context as this may have an impact on how the research is conducted and it may in some cases limit or restrict the research. In this context it is also important to take the organisational culture into consideration as it may inform the readers of important aspects they need to know to understand the research. In addition to the overview

provided on TPHS in section 1.6.3, of Chapter 1, it might be useful for the reader to take note of a particular aspect of the organisational culture of TPHS. Being a small, independent, private higher education provider TPHS has the scope to exercise control over access. Therefore, by limiting the number of students per class TPHS can ensure personal and close contact between the educators and students. This access control is meant to enhance the learning experience and support student success. Against this background one might understand why this study was conducted at TPHS in the first place.

3.3.2.1.3 Policy context

The policy context is important when the research is informed directly by policy as it would outline the policy providing a wider and better informed perspective. However, not all social and educational research is informed directly by policy and therefore it may not be helpful to place the research in a policy context. This study was not informed directly by policy (albeit indirectly by private higher education policies) and therefore this context was not considered highly relevant.

3.3.2.1.4 National context

In some research it may be necessary to include the national context in order for the reader to understand the country's situation if it affects the research in some way. This may not apply to all research. The national context may include the structures, culture and history of the particular aspect being researched. Although it may be useful for readers who are unfamiliar with higher education in the South African context to have the background, in my opinion the matter of student engagement to enhance student success is an international phenomenon and the specific context within South Africa was not critical to the study.

3.3.2.1.5 Theoretical context

Also referred to as the conceptual framework, the theoretical context is based on a search and review of relevant and appropriate literature that is focussed on the topic of the research. Consulting the literature on the research topic enables the researcher to develop and construct a conceptual framework that may be used to

organise the underpinning ideas and theories of the research. The conceptual framework for this study was provided in Chapter 2.

3.3.2.2 Cases

The second step, according to the FraIM, is to identify the cases or participants. Included in this stage is the sampling decisions and data source management. Sampling involves deciding which cases or participants to include in the study, as discussed in section 3.3.3.3. Data source management refers to deciding which approaches will be used for managing the sources of data. Section 3.1.1 describes the mixed method approach that was followed for this study.

3.3.2.3 Methods

The third stage of the FraIM requires the researcher to select the methods of data generation to be used. Primary empirical data were generated for this study; in other words, data generated by the researcher for the first time and specifically for the purpose at hand (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:76). According to the framework, three possible methods of data generation involve (a) observations, (b) asking questions, and (c) artefact analysis. For this study option (b), asking questions, was mainly used through questionnaires and interviews. These methods are discussed in section 3.3.3.

3.3.2.4 Data and data analysis

The FraIM distinguishes between two types of data, numerical and narrative. Both types of data were generated for this study through questionnaires and interviews. The generation of these data is discussed in section 3.4 and the analysis thereof in section 3.5.

3.3.2.5 Evidence, claims and conclusions

From the data generated and analysed, evidence emerged which informed the findings contained in Chapter 4. These findings could be associated with and compared to the literature perspectives explored in Chapter 2 which ultimately allowed me to draw some conclusions in Chapter 5.

3.3.3 Research methods

As stated earlier, a mixed methods design was used in this study. Surveys in the form of survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and academic staff of TPHS. As mentioned in section 3.1.1, pragmatism allows researchers the freedom to use any form of narrative or numeric data, resulting in a mixed methods approach, particularly because different methods of data collection have different positives and drawbacks (Plowright, 2011). With this in mind, the data collection methods opted for this study are discussed briefly below.

3.3.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were chosen as this method can provide a rich source of varied material (Welman *et al.*, 2005:175) and respondents could complete the questionnaires in their own time, allowing for more accurate data collection (Goddard & Melville, 2001:49). As this method of data collection ensures participants' anonymity, the questions are more likely to be answered honestly. Questionnaires remove the issues related to researcher bias as there is no personal contact and the participants cannot be manipulated in any way (Neuman, 1997:239). Table 3.1 provides a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of using closed-ended questions. The advantages and disadvantages of using such questions were taken into account when constructing the questionnaires for this study. A closed-ended question is one where the participant is confronted with a question, but instead of being able to give any answer, they are provided with fixed options for responses from which to choose (Neuman, 1997:240). Two separately designed questionnaires containing closed-ended questions were distributed, one among the five staff members of TPHS and the other among 50 students of TPHS.

Table 3.1: Advantages and disadvantages of using closed-ended questions

Advantages of closed-ended questions	Disadvantages of closed-ended questions
Easier and quicker for participants to answer	Researcher can suggest ideas participants would not otherwise have
Answers of different participants are	Participants with no opinion or

easier to compare	knowledge can still answer
Answers are easier to code and statistically analyse	Participants may become frustrated if their desired answer is not a choice
The response choices can clarify question meaning for participants	Confusing if too many response choices are provided
Participants are more likely to answer about sensitive topics	Misinterpretation of a question can go unnoticed
Fewer irrelevant or confused answers	Distinction between participant answers may be blurred
Less articulate or less literate participants are not at a disadvantage	Clerical mistakes or marking the wrong response is possible
Replication is easier	Participants are forced to give simplistic responses to complex issues

(Source: Adapted from Neuman, 1997:241)

Table 3.1 demonstrates Plowright's (2011) observation that a particular method has various advantages and disadvantages. Neuman (1997:240) explains that it is not a matter of which method is best, but rather which method is best suited for the conditions of the research. In this study questionnaires were found to be a valid method of data collection.

3.3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as such interviews enable respondents to clarify issues that need greater clarity and provide follow-up on answers and trends, providing a versatile way of collecting data (Goddard & Melville, 2001:49; Welman *et al.*, 2005:166,167). Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with five staff members of TPHS, asking staff two open-ended questions (cf. Addendum A), as well as two focus groups with students, consisting of four students each, asking students four open-ended questions (cf. Addendum B). An open-ended question is one where the researcher asks the participant a question to which he or she can provide any answer. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the advantages and

disadvantages of using open-ended questions which were taken into account when conducting interviews for this study.

Table 3.2: Advantages and disadvantages of using open-ended questions

Advantages of open-ended questions	Disadvantages of open-ended questions
Unlimited number of possible answers	Different participants give different amounts of detail
Participants can answer in detail and clarify responses	Responses may be irrelevant or buried in useless detail
Unanticipated finding can be discovered	Comparisons and statistical analysis become difficult
Adequate answers to complex issues are provided	Coding responses is difficult
Creativity, self-expression and richness are permitted	Articulate and highly literate participants have an advantage
The participants' logic, thinking process and frame of reference are revealed	Responses are written verbatim, which makes it difficult for the researcher
	More time, thought and effort are necessary
	Participants may be intimidated by questions

(Source: Adapted from Neuman, 1997:241)

Table 3.2 illustrates how complex the undertaking of interviews may be when using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were opted for in this study with careful consideration of the disadvantages and ethical issues (see section 3.5) to enhance data accuracy and validity. The next section describes the sampling methods used for this study.

3.3.3.3 Sampling

In research, a population constitutes the potential pool of respondents, or everyone that the study pertains to, while the sample is a narrower or particular group selected

on the basis of sampling criteria (Neuman, 1997:202). In making sampling decisions, the researcher has to decide which cases or participants to include in or exclude from the study. Plowright (2011) distinguishes between two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling involves making a random selection of cases for the study whereas non-probability sampling entails basing the sampling decisions on specific criteria that cases must meet, depending on the aims of the study, as opposed to randomised selection.

Using the FraIM as the basis for my research design, I could select any one of a number of sampling types and even use a combination (Plowright, 2011). As TPHS has only a limited number of academic staff and can only accommodate a small number of students, all TPHS academic staff and students were involved in the study. It would not have been useful to randomly select certain students or staff as the participant groups would have been too small to render useful data. Involving the entire population in the survey part of the study reduced the risk of sampling error as each respondent is representative of the population.

Purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997:206; Plowright, 2011) was used for the focus group interviews with students. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that dictates that there is a specific purpose for selecting the sample (Neuman, 1997:206; Plowright, 2011). These sampling methods proved valid and sufficient for this study. In the next section I explain how data were generated from the participants.

3.4 Data generation

As outlined in the previous section, data were generated using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This section provides detail on the data generation process using student (section 3.4.1) and academic staff (section 3.4.2) questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews with students (section 3.4.3) and academic staff (section 3.4.4) of TPHS.

3.4.1 Generating data from student questionnaires

Questionnaires aimed at the students of TPHS were designed, taking the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) framework into consideration. The

SASSE is a survey, meant for higher education providers, that gathers information relating to high-impact experiences and behaviours that potentially have an influence on the teaching and learning, particularly student engagement. The aim of SASSE is to provide higher education providers with high-quality data to inform changes in the learning environment intended to promote student success (UFS, 2013). Only closed-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. Closed-ended questions offer participants a limited range of answers to choose from (Welman *et al.*, 2005). These questionnaires were distributed to 50 students while they were assembled in one venue at the TPHS campus during a normal school day. Before distributing the questionnaires, I (as researcher) explained the term 'student engagement' to the students. This was done to make sure all the students had a uniform understanding of the term; otherwise the data might have proved to be invalid. Students were also informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. The students asked no questions for the sake of clarification and they could complete the questionnaires in their own time. Some students, however, opted to participate and completed the questionnaires immediately, which took about 15 to 20 minutes on average. A total of 47 questionnaires were eventually returned.

3.4.2 Generating data from staff questionnaires

Questionnaires were developed for the staff of TPHS, taking the SASSE framework, as explained in section 3.4.1, into consideration. These questionnaires also contained only closed-ended questions. The questionnaires were distributed to five academic staff members during office hours. The term 'student engagement' was explained to the staff by the researcher to make sure all the staff had a uniform understanding of the term, otherwise the data collected may prove invalid. Staff members were also informed of the fact that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. No questions for clarification were directed at me as researcher and staff could complete the questionnaires in their own time. It took between one and three days for the questionnaires to be returned. All five questionnaires were returned.

3.4.3 Generating data from student interviews

The semi-structured interviews with the two focus groups of four students each were conducted. Oates (2013) draws on research from Kitzinger (1994) and Catterall and Maclaran (1997) to conceptualise a focus group as group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues for the explicit use of group interaction as research data. The value of a focus group therefore lies in the opportunity to analyse the interaction between participants in addition to gaining insight into individuals' experiences. A major appeal in using focus groups for data generation is the rich data provided in the participants' own words. The interviews with the focus groups were conducted during a school day, in between classes with students who were approached and volunteered to take part in the study (see Addendum B for interview questions). In order to acquire students to participate, I approached eight students and asked them whether they would be willing to participate in a focus group interview. The criteria considered for selecting student participants included mostly demographic factors such as gender, race, course enrolled for and advancement in course. Only one student was not willing to participate due to time constraints and a previous engagement, therefore another was asked who agreed, leading to eight participants. I made clear to the participants at the beginning of the interviews that they could give their opinion freely and encouraged them to do so as this would provide accurate data which would contribute to the legitimacy of the study. The purpose of the interviews with the two focus groups was to validate data collected through the questionnaires and also to clarify and probe further into some of the data that emerged from the questionnaires. The interviews were mainly directed by four open-ended questions:

1. What factors make you want to engage?
2. What factors make you want to engage less?
3. Do you engage more in some classes than others? If so, why?
4. Describe an ideal class.

An open-ended question is one a researcher asks without prompting with regard to the range of possible answers. This method ensures a rich source of varied material with limited bias influence from the interviewer (Welman *et al.*, 2005). I directed the

questions one by one at the whole group and those who wanted to, volunteered answers. If a student or students did not volunteer an answer, they were not put under any pressure to do so. Respondents' answers were noted verbatim. Refer to Addendum C for an example of a transcribed response from one focus group student participant.

3.4.4 Generating data from staff interviews

The semi-structured interviews with the five academic staff members were conducted during work hours while they did not have any other obligations such as teaching. The staff members were again assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and all five agreed to participate. The purpose of the interviews with the five staff members was to validate data collected through the questionnaires and also to probe further into some of the information that had emerged from the questionnaires. The interviews were mainly directed by two open-ended questions:

1. What is your view on student engagement?
2. How do you think student engagement is best facilitated?

Respondents' answers were noted verbatim. Refer to Addendum D for an example of a transcribed interview from one staff participant.

3.5 Data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and interviews were analysed by me as researcher using the methods explained below.

3.5.1 Data analysis of questionnaires

To analyse the data of both the student and staff questionnaires, the data were captured in a standalone statistical software programme, Moonstats©. This programme provides the statistical tools for data exploration and data description (Welman *et al.*, 2005). I entered all the data into the system and once all the data had been captured, I had descriptive statistical computations and bivariate statistics to my disposal. For each category the programme generated charts and different variables could be compared using graphs. This function proved useful in the results

and discussion phase of this study. When analysing the data, no attempt was made to generalise the data since the population and sample were small and this study focussed on one institution only, thus it would not be valid to generalise for private higher education institutions based on this study.

3.5.2 Data analysis of interviews

Once the student interviews had been conducted I organised the raw data into conceptual categories in order to identify emerging themes, and this process was used to analyse the data (Neuman, 1997:421). As themes emerged, these themes were coded and plotted using an Excel spreadsheet. Open coding, which entailed locating themes and assigning initial codes to each theme in an attempt to make the data manageable, was used for this study. The identified themes were assigned codes, but the possibility still existed for creating new themes and changing existing codes. The purpose of the coding was to make the amount of data manageable and meaningful (Welman *et al.*, 2005:213). Themes were given numbers (Neuman, 1997:420), but care was taken not to let the meaning of the narrative disappear (Welman *et al.*, 2005:2013). Through the blending of empirical evidence the numbers therefore represented new concepts.

Since only five staff members took part in the staff interviews, these responses were not coded, but merely stated verbatim. The responses are provided and discussed in Chapter 4.

3.6 Validity of the study

The following sections address the matters of validity, reliability and trustworthiness as these aspects are portrayed in the literature and how they are related to this study.

3.6.1 Validity

Determining validity is crucial to the integrity of a research study, especially if conclusions are to be drawn and recommendations made. Validity is defined as “... the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in a situation” (Welman *et al.*, 2005:142; Plowright, 2011). Stainback and

Stainback (1984, cited in Welman *et al.*, 2005:9) state that all research aims should be valid and reliable (Plowright, 2011:134). In simple terms, it can be said that research is valid if it is a true account of the object of study (Plowright, 2011:135). Factors that threaten the validity of research include faulty research procedures, poor samples and inaccurate or misleading measurement (Welman *et al.*, 2005:142). Welman *et al.* (2005:106) explain that there are various requirements to be met for research to be considered valid. One major requirement is that the chosen research design should enable the researcher to answer the research question and therefore serve the purpose for which the research is being conducted. It is important to note that there are factors that may influence the research that are beyond the researcher's control, such as history, spontaneous change and other variables (Welman *et al.*, 2005:109).

Throughout this study every effort was made to ensure that the validity of the study was not compromised. Relevant and up to date literature was used to inform the study and the data collection was done to respond to a real issue experienced at TPHS. There was minimal interference with the data collection. Only the meaning of 'student engagement' was explained to participants, thus they were not prompted in any way on how to respond. The research question for this study was relevant to the context and situation, the participants were the real students and academic staff of the institution and the data would therefore be expected to reflect the position of student engagement at a particular point in time at the institution (Plowright, 2011). The study results could not be generalised as the research was confined to one institution and a particular group of students and staff. A similar study may, however, be conducted at another institution where different variables may apply.

3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the research findings and how credible these findings are (Welman *et al.*, 2005:145). Factors that may influence a study's reliability include the researcher's mood when conducting the research or data may be misinterpreted (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Various techniques may be employed to develop reliable research measures such as making sure to only ask questions that participants are likely to know the answer to, asking questions relevant to the participants and being clear on what one is asking (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). When generating data for this

study every attempt was made to ensure that I as the researcher was in a clear, focussed frame of mind with careful consideration for the meaning of answers so that misinterpretation should not occur. Questions directed at participants were stated clearly.

3.6.3 Trustworthiness

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), trustworthiness in research refers to whether the findings of the study are worth taking into account. Trustworthiness may be determined when comparing it to criteria (De Vos, 2005b:345). Quoting Guba (1981), Shenton (2004:63) mentions four criteria researchers must consider for research to be trustworthy: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Each of these criteria are briefly discussed next to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this study. Credibility refers to the researcher's ability to present a true reflection of the issue being scrutinised. Transferability requires the researcher to provide adequate context of the fieldwork in order for the readers to determine whether the environment pertaining to the study is similar to another situation and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to another setting. Dependability is concerned with the ability for future researchers to repeat the same study in a different setting; at least some effort should be made by the researcher to enable this. Finally, confirmability requires the researcher to demonstrate that the findings emerge from the data and not their own predisposition.

For this study, in terms of credibility, the empirical data were generated (section 3.4) from the real students and staff of TPHS and the data would therefore be expected to reflect the true nature of the institution. Concerning transferability, section 1.6.3 in Chapter 1 contains information on the research location which may inform the reader of the research environment enabling them to determine whether the findings of this study may apply to a similar, but different setting. Regarding dependability, in my opinion, this study could be repeated in future by other researchers, but the methods of data generation pertaining to the size and scope of the institution and population may differ. This would also lead to different means of data analysis. Finally, in terms of confirmability, findings produced and reported in Chapter 4 of this study were based solely on the data generated and how they were compared to the literature perspectives provided in Chapter 2, noting correlations and drawing conclusions in

Chapter 5. This study may therefore be considered trustworthy. The next section covers the ethical considerations taken into account in this study.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethics is an important aspect of research and it can complicate the process at times (Plowright, 2011:149). Ethics is a construct typically understood as moral “rules and conventions which distinguish socially acceptable behaviour” (Anderson, 1990:17). Plowright (2011:150) states that ethics draws on both general moral principles relating to attitudes, beliefs and relations between people as well as specific moral principles associated with, for example, a particular profession or activity. Hammersley and Traianou (2007, cited in Plowright, 2011:153) identified five main ethical principles that were considered when conducting this study:

- **Harm.** Will anyone be harmed by the research? No person or entity was harmed through this study.
- **Autonomy.** Can the participants choose to take part in the research or not? Participants of this study were provided the option to participate in the research or not without duress or undue influence.
- **Privacy.** What information obtained from participants will be made public? Participants in this study were informed that their identities would not be made public, merely their responses to questions.
- **Reciprocity.** Will anything be offered in return for participating in the research? No compensation of any kind was offered for participation in this study.
- **Equity.** All participants must be treated equally without favour or discrimination. No distinction was made whatsoever between participants.

Ethical misconduct in research can occur in many regards (Larkham & Manns, 2002:346), including the theoretical and/or empirical aspects of conducting research such as plagiarism and misrepresentation of data (Howe & Moses, 1999:28; Lucas & Lidstone, 2000:53; Samuels & Bast, 2006:155; Evering & Moorman, 2012:35). Every effort was made to avoid ethical misconduct throughout this study by referencing all others' ideas as theirs and not my own. Data were also collected and analysed to reflect their true meaning. Other aspects of ethical misconduct in research may

include issues of research sponsorship/funding, exploiting children [or other parties] and misinterpretation of data or withholding important findings (Anderson, 1990:18). In an attempt to reduce the negative consequences of such ethical misconduct in research, several critical issues have been established for researchers to consider. Anderson (1990:22-26) identified the following measures which were employed in this study to ensure it is ethically sound:

- **Informed consent.** Participants in research must be informed of the nature and purpose of the study, including the risks and benefits involved. Participants must give their voluntary consent to take part in the study. This was done for this study as students and academic staff of TPHS were informed about the study, why it was being conducted and that their participation was in no way compulsory or expected.
- **Using volunteers.** Volunteers often feel obliged to participate and/or believe that the research will help them in some way. Each participant in this research study volunteered to do so.
- **Honesty.** Researchers must always be honest and their research must be transparent. In my opinion the research process was conducted honestly.
- **The right to discontinue.** Participants must be allowed to withdraw their participation at any time during the study. Participants were given the option to withdraw or not answer certain questions if they did not wish to do so.
- **Debriefing.** It is advised that researchers share their findings with participants and clarify any uncertainties participants may have. The participants were informed that they would be informed of the research findings and implications once the study had been completed.
- **Confidentiality.** The researcher and participants must agree on whether the identity of participants may be made known. If not, it is vital that the participants remain anonymous. Participants did remain anonymous throughout this study. Only the identity of the institution was made known, with the director's consent.

- **Right to privacy.** Participants must enjoy their right to privacy, controlling what information they disclose. Participants did not have to volunteer any information they wished to withhold.
- **Respecting participants' time.** Research should avoid wasting participants' time with irrelevant questions or studies that are unlikely to yield significant results. Few questions were asked during interviews and the questionnaires included only relevant, important aspects. Therefore, in my opinion, it was not a waste of participants' time.
- **Risks vs. benefits.** It is important that the potential benefits for participants outweigh the potential risks. There were no risks involved in this study.
- **Vulnerable populations.** Researchers must be cautious when dealing with participants that are particularly vulnerable in terms of age, for example. The population of this study was not considered to be vulnerable.

From this section the reader may gain an understanding of the ethical issues considered when undertaking this study as well as the measures taken to avoid ethical misconduct.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the research design and methods of this study. To summarise, the study was conducted from a pragmatic stance allowing me as the researcher the freedom to use any form of narrative or numeric data, resulting in a mixed method approach (Plowright: 2011). Plowright's (2011) FraIM served as the design element for this study, guiding the research process accordingly. The methods of data generation included self-constructed questionnaires for staff and students as well as semi-structured interviews with staff and students of TPHS. Data analysis was conducted by using a standalone statistical software programme Moonstats© for numerical data and data coding was used for narrative data. This study may be considered valid, reliable and trustworthy against the background provided in section 3.6. Section 3.7 explains the ethical considerations that informed this study. The sections describing the data generation

(section 3.4) and analysis (section 3.5) provide the base to inform the results and discussion that follow in the next chapter (Chapter 4) where the empirical findings of this study are compared to the relevant literature explored in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided an overview of literature relevant to this study and Chapter 3 gave an outline of how the empirical part of the research was conducted at The Private Hotel School (TPHS). The aim of this chapter is to provide the results that emerged from the data collection at TPHS and discuss these accordingly. The results from the questionnaires (section 4.2) and interviews (section 4.3), together with a discussion of each, is presented in the following sections.

4.2 Questionnaires

As mentioned in Chapter 3, self-constructed questionnaires were distributed to students and academic staff of TPHS. Student and staff questionnaires were constructed using the SASSE as framework. The results of the questionnaires completed by students (section 4.2.1) and staff (section 4.2.2) are discussed next.

4.2.1 Student questionnaires

Of the 50 questionnaires distributed to TPHS students, 47 were returned. The questionnaires distributed among students consisted of five sections, each section with a different focus. The five sections were (1) demographic information, (2) students' perceptions of student engagement (SE), (3) students' perceptions of the role of the institution in SE, (4) holistic development, and (5) academic focus and commitment. The results from each of these sections will be presented and discussed separately.

4.2.1.1 Demographic information

The first section of the student questionnaire covered demographics of the student population of TPHS. Demographic information covered the aspects listed and

discussed in 4.2.1.1.1 – 4.2.1.1.6 below. An explanation is provided for why each demographic factor was included.

4.2.1.1.1 Age

Figure 4.1 indicates the age distribution of the student participants. The majority (72.34%) of the students at TPHS were between the ages of 18 and 21 years. Of these, 23.4% were between the ages of 22 and 25 and 2.13% were between the ages of 26 and 30. Only one student was older than 30 years.

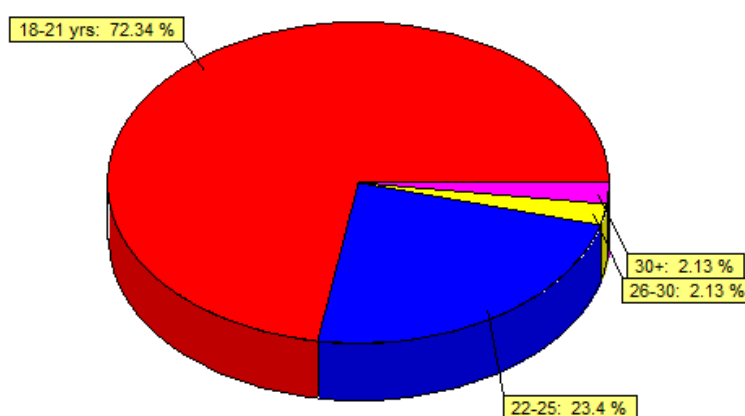


Figure 4.1: Age distribution of student participants

In Figure 4.1 the red section represents participants between the ages of 18 and 21 years, the blue section represents participants between the ages of 22 and 25 years, the yellow section represents the participants between the ages of 26 and 30 years and the pink section represents the participants older than 30 years. Figure 4.1 indicates that the majority of TPHS students most probably commence their tertiary education directly after high school. In view of Koljatic and Kuh (2001), Kuh (2007), Kuh *et al.* (2011) and Strom and Strom's (2013) perspective that first-year students are generally unprepared or under-prepared for higher education studies, student age is an important factor for educators of TPHS to take into account. Should it be determined that many students struggle to adapt to the higher education environment or cannot manage the level of learning expected of them, student support initiatives may be relevant. Such initiatives, which are mentioned by Cruce *et al.* (2008) (see Chapter 2, section 2.5.4), include well-designed orientation programmes, first-year seminars, construct learning communities, intrusive advising,

early warning systems, peer tutoring and mentoring and effective teaching practices to reduce first-year students' risk of failing.

Age as a demographic factor was also included in the student questionnaire to determine whether there is some resemblance between a students' age and learning engagement. The reasoning behind this is that one might naturally expect older students who have advanced further in their studies to have accepted more responsibility and to be more engaged – thus that they will achieve greater success (Dean, 2011). This relationship was, however, difficult to determine as the vast majority (72.34%) of TPHS students fall into the 18 to 21 year category. Considering self-motivation as an important indicator of student engagement (Kranstuber *et al.*, 2012:44), students' rating of their self-motivation related to their age was inquired into. Figure 4.2 illustrates student responses from different age categories to the statement “I am self-motivated.”

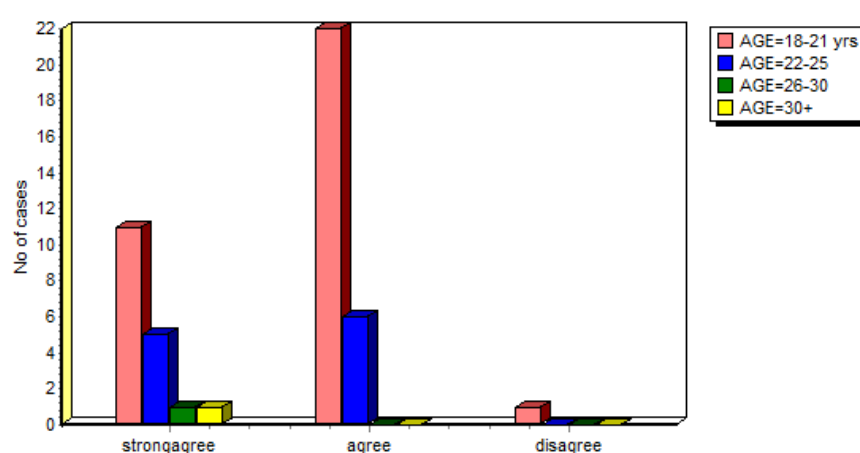


Figure 4.2: Student self-motivation related to their age

It could be deduced from Figure 4.2 that some students (27.66%) who fell into the older age categories responded positively when asked whether they perceived themselves as self-motivated. It is important to mention that self-motivation is only one aspect of student engagement and does not represent students' attitudes within the entire construct of student engagement (Cruce *et al.*, 2008:540). Therefore the data presented in Figure 4.2 suggest a possible trend rather than a firm indication of a relationship between age and self-motivation.

4.2.1.1.2 Gender

Figure 4.3 indicates the gender distribution of the student participants. Gender was included as a demographic factor to determine whether students from the smaller group may display different perceptions of behaviour in terms of engagement and perhaps even success as these may be influenced by the presence of an outnumbering counterpart.

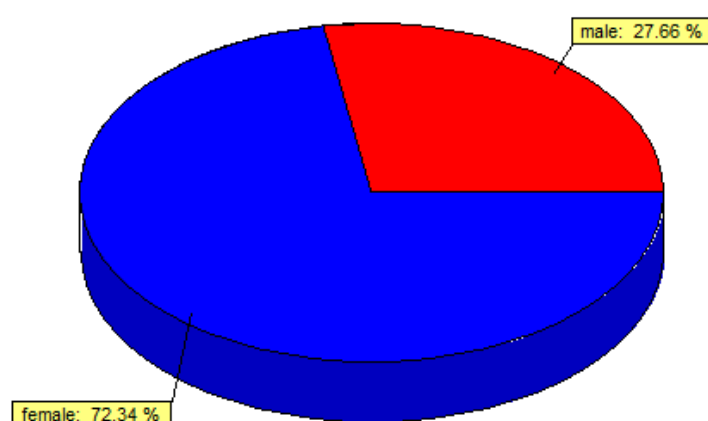


Figure 4.3: Gender distribution of student participants

Figure 4.3 illustrates that the majority of the students were females (72.34%) with less than a third being males (27.66%). The smaller male presence may be due to some resistance that still exists in society that the hospitality and culinary industry is not a career suitable for males, especially among 'Baby Boomer' citizens who are the parents of the current generation of students (Kane, 2014). This cannot, however, be deduced without further research into this topic.

4.2.1.1.3 Course students are enrolled for

Figure 4.4 indicates the duration of the courses that students were enrolled for. This was included to explore whether students enrolled for different courses perceive their engagement in learning differently.

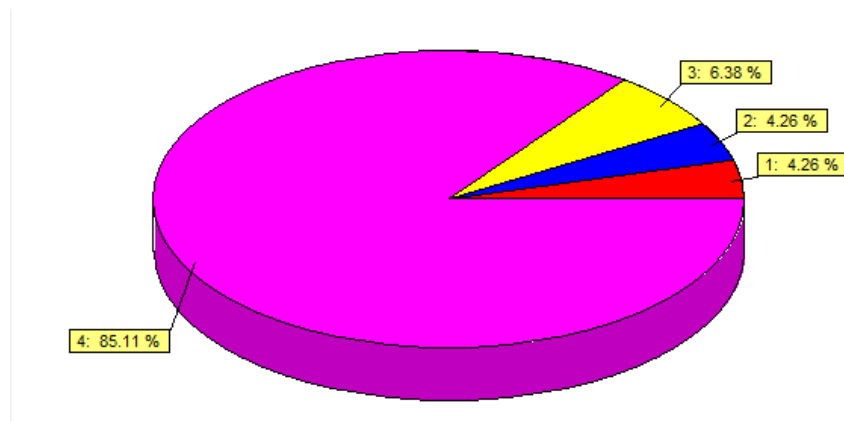


Figure 4.4: Duration of course

In Figure 4.4 '1' (red section) refers to a six-months' course, '2' (blue section) to a nine-months' course, '3' (yellow section) to a one-year course and '4' (purple section) to a two-year course. Figure 4.4 shows that most students (85.11%) were enrolled for the full two-year course as opposed to other short courses (14.9%). The duration of the courses students were enrolled for was included as a demographic factor because it was suspected that students not enrolled for the full-time courses may tend to be less engaged due to a mindset of "I am only here for six months". Students who enrol for short-term courses often resist active involvement as they see their presence as temporary and often do not wish to become involved in social groups or activities related to institutional cohesion (Yorke & Longden, 2004:118). This, however, does not mean that such students may not actively engage in their learning as, illustrated by Figure 4.5, students enrolled at TPHS for shorter courses of six or nine months or one year all responded positively to the questionnaire question "I enjoy opportunities to engage in the classroom."

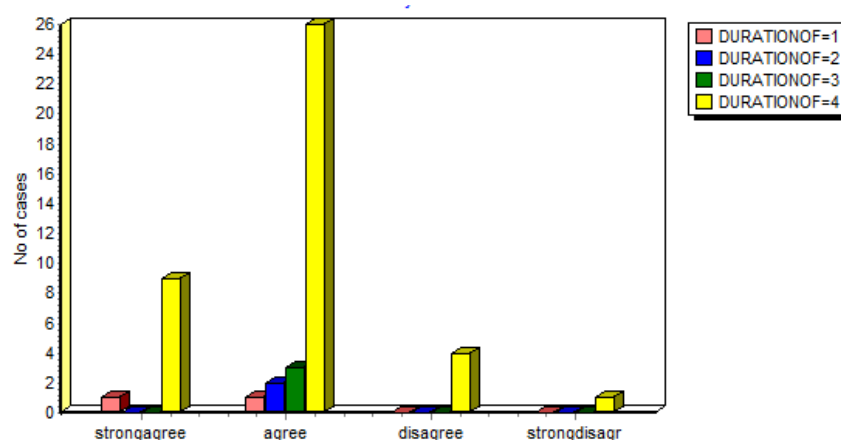


Figure 4.5: Students enrolled for short courses' feeling about engagement

In Figure 4.5 '1' (pink section) refers to a six-months' course, '2' (blue section) to a nine-months' course, '3' (green section) to a one-year course and '4' (yellow section) to a two-year course. From the figure one may deduct that no students enrolled for the shorter courses of six, nine or twelve months felt negatively about student engagement.

4.2.1.1.4 Ethnic distribution of participants

Figure 4.6 displays the ethnic distribution of students. Ethnicity at TPHS was included as a demographic factor to explore the relation, if any, between minority ethnic groups and their engagement behaviour.

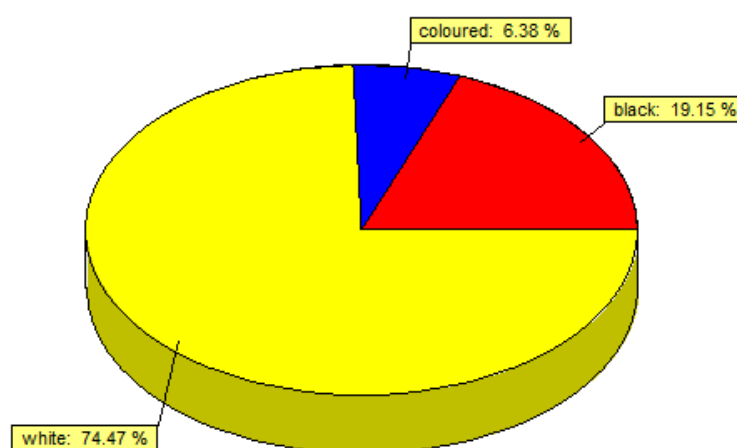


Figure 4.6: Ethnic distribution of student participants

Figure 4.6 indicates that the ethnic distribution of TPHS student participants was 74.47% white, 19.15% black and 6.38% coloured. Exploring ethnicity as a factor may provide more information on whether students who are ethnically different to their peers and educators engage differently to majority groups. Since the majority group of white students made up such a large portion of the student respondents it was not possible to deduce clearly whether ethnicity had some influence on students' tendencies to engage in their learning. What could, however, be determined is that students who were in an ethnic minority in the participant group reported lower ratings when presented with the statement "I ask questions in class" as illustrated by Figure 4.7.

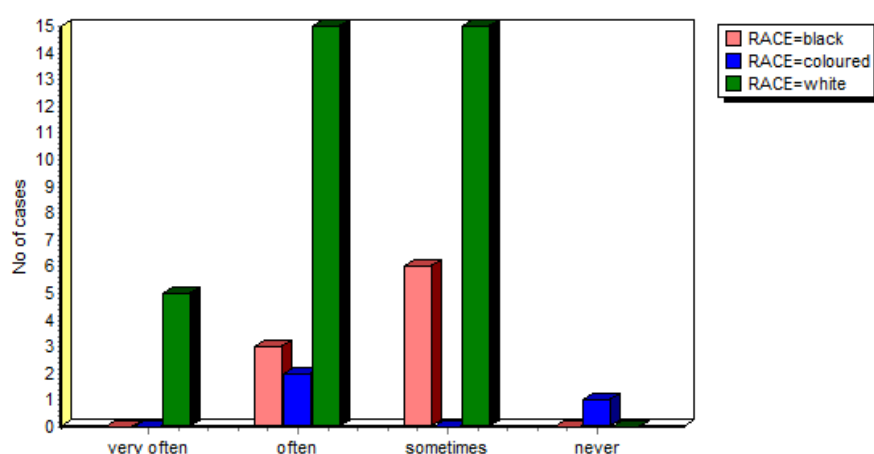


Figure 4.7: Ethnic groups' tendency to ask questions in class

In Figure 4.7 it is clear that only students from a minority group ('coloured' = blue section) state that they 'never' ask questions in class. From Figure 4.7 one may deduct that the lower tendency of minority ethnic groups to ask questions in class could be due to factors other than race or ethnicity. However, as was pointed out in Chapter 2 (section 2.4, for students to engage it is vital that they feel welcome, accepted, safe and valued. As suggested, educators may modify their lessons to incorporate aspects from the various students' cultures to reduce or even eliminate feelings of confusion, alienation, disconnection or exclusion (Anon, 2014b). The indication that minority groups tend to engage less is in contradiction with McGrath's (2014) statement that the current generation of students are much more accepting of others with a less stringent focus on differences in race, sexual orientation and religion (McGrath, 2014). A study conducted by Cruce *et al.* (2008) indicated that the direct effect of educationally purposeful activities differs somewhat by ethnicity; however, deeper inquiry into the matter would be required to make more valid statements for this study.

4.2.1.1.5 First language distribution of participants

Figure 4.8 indicates the first language of students. The first language of students was included as a demographic factor to determine whether students who are in a language minority position would rate engagement practices differently from those in a majority language position.

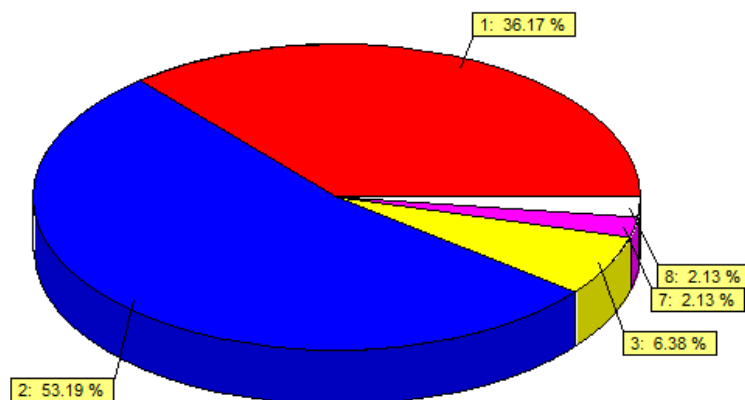


Figure 4.8: First language distribution of student participants

In Figure 4.8 '1' (red section) refers to Afrikaans, '2' (blue section) refers to English, '3' (yellow section) refers to Xhosa, '7' (pink section) refers to Sesotho and '8' (white section) refers to Setswana. Numbers 4 to 6 have been omitted from the figure, because there were no student respondents who selected those options as a first language. Figure 4.8 indicates that the most common first language of the students was English (53.19%), with Afrikaans (36.17%) and Xhosa (6.38%) second and third. One student's first language was Sesotho and one other student's first language was Setswana. While a variety of factors may influence students' attitudes to and relationships with their peers, language was considered an important factor as one might naturally assume that students prefer communication in their first language (Ngcobo, 2009). Therefore, if they find themselves in an environment where few or no others speak and understand their first language and they are expected to communicate in a second or even third language, this may influence their willingness to engage in their learning. This was also pointed out by a participant in the student focus group interviews discussed later in section 4.3.1.1. In an attempt to illustrate this point, the first language indication of students was compared to their response to a question in the student questionnaire: "Do you feel positive, negative or neutral towards your peers?" Figure 4.9 illustrates this comparison.

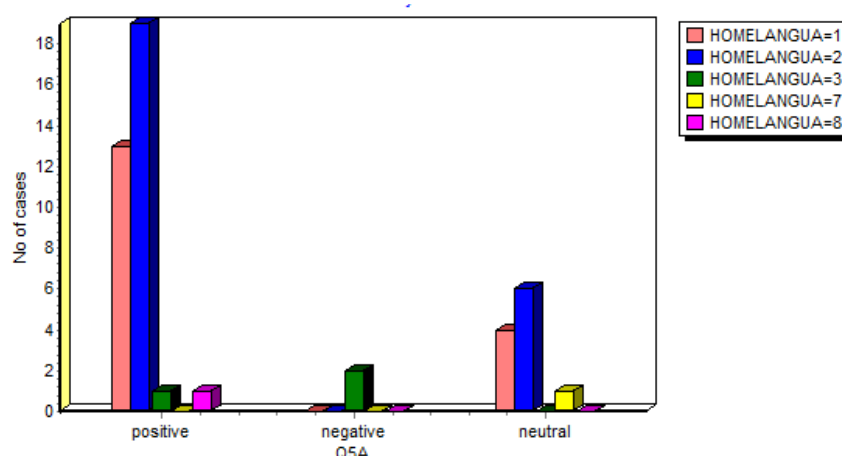


Figure 4.9: Students' first language compared to their perception of peers

In Figure 4.9 '1' (pink section) refers to English, '2' (blue section) refers to Afrikaans, '3' refers to Xhosa, '7' refers to Sesotho and '8' refers to Setswana. Numbers 4 to 6 have been omitted from the figure, because there were no student respondents who selected those options as a first language. Figure 4.9 illustrates students' different first languages and how they responded to a question asking them to rate their feelings towards their peers. From the figure one cannot deduct with certainty that students' first language is the major factor influencing these students' attitudes towards their peers as a variety of other factors may play a role. What may be pointed out, however, is that the only negative feelings towards peers, as reported in the student questionnaires and shown in Figure 4.9, were found among students who had Xhosa, being a minority first language, as home language. From the focus group interviews with students (section 4.3.1.1) it also emerged that foreign students sometimes refrain from answering questions or taking part in class discussion as they feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in another language which may related to the findings reported in Figure 4.9.

4.2.1.1.6 Marital status

Figure 4.10 displays the marital status of students. Marital status was included as a demographic factor as having a spouse at home or having to take care of children may influence a student's time available to devote to their studies.

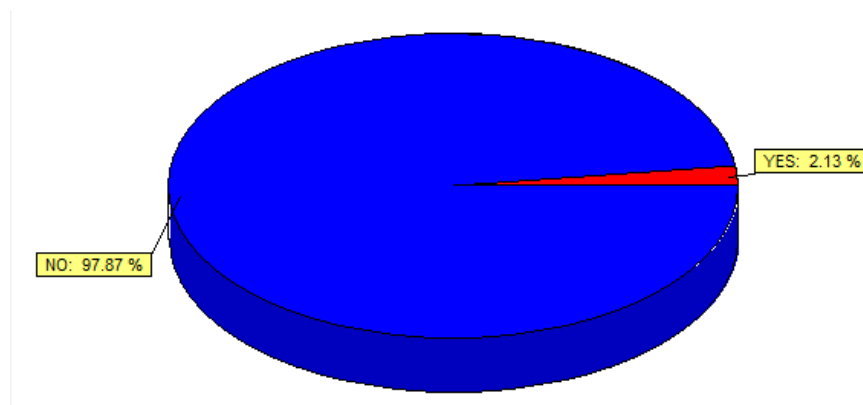


Figure 4.10: Marital status of student participants

While almost 98% of the student respondents were unmarried, only one student at TPHS was married with children. Since only one respondent out of 47 was married, this factor was not considered an important aspect related to the findings, but was included in view of Zepke *et al.*'s (2014) view that family life can have an impact on students' engagement in their studies.

What one can conclude overall from the demographic information is that the typical TPHS student is a school leaver who starts studying immediately after Grade 12. She is a female, enrolled for the full-time two-year qualification, white, English-speaking and unmarried. What also emerged from the demographic data was that there seem to be indications of linkages between student age and self-motivation as the data reported indicated that older students all responded positively to a question asking to indicate self-motivation. Possible correspondence between students' ethnicity and first language and their engagement tendencies was also considered. From the data reported one might deduct that students from minority ethnic groups as well as students from minority first language groups are less likely to engage in the classroom. Considering that self-motivation is only one aspect of student engagement and that ethnicity and first language may not be the only factors influencing students' engagement, these findings are to be considered suggestive rather than indicative. The feedback from student participants pertaining to student engagement is presented next.

4.2.1.2 Students' perceptions of student engagement

The second section of the student questionnaire consisted of two questions aimed at exploring how students engage in their own learning. The results for the first question are summarised in Table 4.1 with a discussion that follows.

Table 4.1: Students' perceptions of their own engagement in learning (n=47)

Engagement activity	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I read the prescribed textbooks for each subject	25.53%	59.93%	12.77%	2.13%
I do additional reading for academic enrichment	10.64%	48.93%	40.43%	0%
Assignments and tests help me to master the subject content	38.3%	55.31%	4.26%	2.13%
Poor results motivate me to work harder	34.04%	55.32%	10.64%	0%
I am self-motivated	38.3%	59.57%	2.13%	0%
I just want to pass	25.53%	27.66%	38.3%	8.51%
I think critically about topics that interest me and question others' opinions on them	38.3%	48.93%	12.77%	0%
When I don't know, I ask	29.79%	59.57%	10.64%	0%
Lecturers actively try to get me to engage in the classroom	17.02%	61.7%	19.15%	2.13%
Lecturers actively try to get me to engage outside of the classroom	2.13%	46.8%	48.94%	2.13%
I enjoy opportunities to engage in the classroom	21.28%	65.95%	10.64%	2.13%
More opportunities should be created for engagement	21.28%	57.44%	21.28%	0%

As indicated in Table 4.1, the majority of participating students (85.46%) agreed with the statement that they read the prescribed textbook for each subject. In addition, the majority of students (59.57%) agreed that that they do additional reading for academic enrichment. Furthermore, 93.61% of students agreed that assignments and tests help them to master the subject content. All except for 10.64% of the students admitted that poor results motivate them to work harder. The majority of

students (97.87%) reported being self-motivated, but in contrast, a majority (53.19%) also stated that they only want to pass. This may be linked to both Westerman's (2007) and McGrath's (2014) findings that students generally lack motivation. The majority of students (87.23%) stated that they critically think about topics that interest them and question others' opinions. This corresponds with Westerman's (2007) explanation of the current student generation's tendency to question the validity of information and Twenge's (2009:398) findings that the current generation of students are not afraid to speak their mind. Most students (89.36%) indicated that if they do not understand something that they will ask. Most students (78.72%) were also of the opinion that in general lecturers try to engage them actively in classroom learning, but not necessarily outside of the classroom (48.93% of student respondents). Most students (87.23%) stated that they enjoy opportunities to engage in classroom learning and more opportunities for engagement should be created (78.72%). From the findings reported in Table 4.1 it thus seems that the majority of students are positive about engagement, but want more opportunities for engagement to be created. The importance of creating such opportunities is stressed by Hallinger and Lu (2013:595), especially with regard to allowing students to link theoretical knowledge with real-life examples and practical knowledge.

The second question of this section of the student questionnaire focussed on particular engagement practices in the classroom and how students rate their participation in these practices. Table 4.2 below provides a summary of student views being asked how often they take part in engagement practices. To indicate the results of student responses, the 'very often' and 'often' options were jointly calculated while 'sometimes' and 'never' were kept as indicated in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Students' views on participation in engagement practices

Engagement practice	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Ask questions in class	10.64%	42.55%	44.68%	2.13%
Take part in class discussions	17.02%	46.81%	36.17%	0%
Present on a topic in class	6.38%	40.43%	51.06%	2.13%

Prepare draft versions of assignments before handing in a final copy	6.38%	19.15%	44.68%	29.79%
Work on an assignment that requires you to use multiple sources of information	17.02%	61.7%	21.28%	0%
Attend class without preparation	12.77%	27.66%	55.32%	4.26%
Fail to submit assignments on time	4.26%	12.77%	23.4%	59.57%
Work on projects with other students in class	2.13%	31.91%	57.45%	8.51%
Work with classmates outside of the classroom	12.77%	36.17%	38.3%	12.77%
Act as mentor for another student	2.13%	29.79%	51.06%	17.02%
Communicate with lecturers via an electronic medium	8.51%	29.79%	57.45%	4.26%
Discuss marks or assignments with lecturers	17.02%	27.66%	36.17%	19.15%
Discuss career plans with a lecturer	12.77%	17.02%	46.81%	23.4%
Discuss your thoughts on a topic with a lecturer	12.77%	31.91%	34.04%	21.28%
Discuss your thoughts on a topic with friends and/or family	23.4%	36.17%	31.91%	8.51%
Have serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity	21.28%	27.66%	40.43%	10.64%
Skip class	2.13%	0%	25.53%	72.34%

As indicated in Table 4.2, more than half (53.19%) of the students indicated that they 'very often' or 'often' ask questions in class, 44.68% stated they only sometimes ask questions in class and 2.13% that they never do; 63.83% of students indicated that they 'very often' or 'often' take part in class discussions and 36.17% that they only

sometimes do. This finding may relate to the current generation of students' empowerment (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Twenge, 2009:399) and assertiveness, as emphasised by various authors (Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Twenge, 2009:398; McGrath, 2014). Only 4.26% of the students indicated that they never attend class without preparation while 55.32% stated that they only sometimes attend class without preparation and 40.43% very often or often attend class without preparing. The responses indicate that 53.19% of the students only 'sometimes' or 'never' present on a topic in class while 46.81% very often or often do so, and 74.47% of students only sometimes or never prepare draft versions of assignments before handing in a final copy, whereas 25.53% very often or often do so. Such responses may be a reflection of Westerman (2007) and Kane's (2014) views that present-day students expect to achieve without putting in too much effort. Most students (78.72%) reported that they very often or often work on assignments that require them to use multiple sources of information, but 21.28% reported that they only sometimes do so. Less than a quarter of students (17.03%) reported that they very often or often fail to submit assignments on time while 23.4% reported that they only sometimes do so and 59.57% that they never fail to submit assignments on time. In contrast to the lack of effort indicated earlier, this reported diligence may be in agreement with findings from Twenge (2009:398), Kane (2014) and Zepke *et al.* (2014). These researchers found that the current generation of students are achievement-oriented with high expectations of themselves. Reports on working on projects with other students in class indicated that 34.04% of students very often or often work with peers in class, 57.45% only sometimes and 8.51% never. In terms of working with peers outside of the classroom, almost half (48.94%) of the students stated that they very often or often do so while 38.3% only sometimes and 12.77% never do. This finding may be contrary to Kane (2014) and McGrath's (2014) work which indicates that students today are team-oriented and seek the affirmation and input of others – but then such team- or group work needs to be facilitated. This finding also ties in with the fact that the majority of students (51.06%) reported that they only sometimes act as a mentor for another student whereas 31.92% very often or often and 17.02% never do. Little more than a third of students (38.3%) indicated that they very often or often use an electronic medium to communicate with lecturers while more (57.45%) reported to do so only sometimes and 4.26% never. According

to Kane (2014), students from the current generation may benefit from mentorship where electronic feedback and guidance are available to them. While the responses for discussing marks or assignments with lecturers were varied, only 19.15% of students reported that they never do so, 36.17% that they only sometimes and 44.68% that they very often or often do so. Almost half (46.81%) of the students indicated that they sometimes discuss career plans with a lecturer whereas 29.79% reported that they very often or often do so and 23.4% that they never do. Similarly, 34.04% of students indicated that they only sometimes discuss their thoughts on a topic with a lecturer while almost half (44.68%) of the students reported that they very often or often do and 21.28% that they never do so. These findings may be contradictory to the characteristic of the current generation to question others' opinions (Westerman, 2007). A total of 59.57% of the students reported that they very often or often discuss their thoughts on a topic with their family and/or friends while 31.91% said they only sometimes do and 8.51% that they never do so. Similarly, 40.43% of students indicated that they only sometimes have serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity while 48.94% stated that they very often or often do so and 10.64% that they never have such conversations. This supports McGrath's (2014) observation that the current generation of students are more accepting of others with a less stringent focus on differences in, for example, race, as well as Westerman's (2007) view that these students connect easily with others. The majority of students (72.34%) reported that they never skip class, but 25.53% said they sometimes do so and 2.13% that they very often skip class.

As shown in Table 4.2, the following aspects had a combined very often and often rating of more than 50%, therefore these may be considered strong engagement practices: working on assignments that require the use of multiple sources of information (78.72%), attending class (72.34%), taking part in class discussions (63.83%), discussing thoughts with friends and/or family (59.57%), submitting assignments (59.57%) and asking questions in class (53.19%). Issues that may be considered less engaging due to a rating of lower than 30% are discussing career plans with a lecturer (29.79%) and preparing draft versions of assignments before handing in final copy (25.53%).

4.2.1.3 Students' perceptions of the institutional role in student engagement

The third section of the questionnaire consisted of three questions that aimed to discover firstly what engagement practices are being employed at TPHS as perceived by the students and secondly what engagement practices students would like to be made available. Students' perceptions of their relationships with their peers were also addressed. Question 1 of this section of the questionnaire is summarised in Table 4.3 below, indicating the number of students who would take part in the additional engagement opportunities listed if these would be made available at TPHS. These preferences are ranked in terms of preference as expressed by all students.

Table 4.3: How students prefer to participate in additional engagement opportunities if offered

Engagement opportunity	Students who would participate
An additional language course	74.47%
Community-based projects addressing needs of the local community	61.7%
A course to develop your study skills	57.45%
Academic guidance services	53.19%
A course to develop your writing skills	36.17%
A course to develop your reading skills	21.28%

As can be seen from Table 4.3, 74.47% of students would take an additional language course, 61.7% would take part in community-based projects addressing the needs of the local community, 57.45% would take a course to develop their study skills, 53.19% would make use of academic guidance services, 36.17% would take a course to develop their writing skills and 21.28% would take a course to develop their reading skills. These findings indicate that the students were willing to participate in additional engagement opportunities should they be made available. Considering these engagement opportunities as enriching and supportive, they

relate well to Fletcher's (2014) indicators of student engagement, which include enriching educational experiences and supportive learning environments. Henning (2012:15) quotes Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2007) when stating that higher education institutions should be proactive in their approach to allocating resources to foster an environment with opportunities in which students can freely engage in the learning process. Similarly, Sedlacek (2004, cited in Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012) identify community involvement as an important non-cognitive variable of student success.

The second question of the 'institutional role' section of the questionnaire asked students to indicate how much emphasis lecturers at TPHS place on certain engagement practices. The responses are summarised in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: TPHS students' perceptions of the emphasis TPHS places on engagement activities

Engagement activities	Very much	Much	Not much	Not at all
Emphasising the importance of spending much of your time studying	27.66%	63.83%	8.51%	0%
Providing the academic support you need to be successful	21.28%	61.7%	17.02%	0%
Encouraging contact between you and your peers	19.15%	42.55%	38.3%	0%
Helping you cope with non-academic matters	6.38%	38.3%	36.17%	19.15%
Introducing a variety of teaching methods that all students can understand	23.4%	38.3%	34.04%	4.26%

From the students' perceptions on engagement activities as portrayed in Table 4.4 one may make a few deductions. Firstly, most student responses (91.49%) indicated that lecturers spend very much or much time emphasising the importance of spending enough time studying; secondly, most student responses (82.98%) indicated that lecturers and other staff provide very much or much support to

students when needed; thirdly, more than half (61.7%) of student responses indicated that lecturers encourage interaction between students and their peers; fourthly, less than half (44.68%) of the students experienced that lecturers aim to assist them with non-academic matters; and lastly, the majority of the students (61.7%) agreed that lecturers employ varied teaching methods sufficiently to engage all students. The factors listed in Table 4.4 are important to consider in view of literature reporting that educators must be supportive of students (Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.*, 2013; Anon, 2014b; Fletcher, 2014; Zepke *et al.*, 2014), that student interaction with their peers is an important aspect of student success (Cruce *et al.*, 2008; (Anon, 2014b), that students from the current generation want their educators to see them as individuals with a personal life (Westerman, 2007; Wolpert-Gawron (2012) and that students require different teaching methods as they have different learning styles (Westerman, 2007; De Frondeville, 2009; Morgan, 2014; Patterson, 2014).

The third question of this section of the questionnaire asked students to rate their relationships with various other entities at TPHS. Table 4.5 provides a summary of these ratings.

Table 4.5: Students of TPHS's relationship with other entities at the institution

Institutional entities	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Peers	72.34%	23.4%	4.26%
Lecturers	68.08%	29.79%	2.13%
Administrative staff	44.68%	48.94%	6.38%
Support staff	70.21%	19.15%	10.64%
Management	46.81%	36.17%	17.02%

As indicated in Table 4.5, it is clear that most of the students are positive about their relationships with peers (72.3%), lecturers (68.08%) and support staff (70.21%). Less than half of the students (46.81%) are positive about management staff and 48.49% seem to be neutral about administrative staff. Student perceptions of these

relationships are considered important as the very definition of student success (see Chapter 1, section 1.7) states that developing and sustaining interpersonal relationships institution-wide is an important aspect of student success (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001; AACU, 2006; Cruce *et al.*, 2008).

4.2.1.4 Holistic development

The fourth section of the student questionnaire focussed on aspects related to students' holistic development and contained only one question. This question required students to indicate which areas they had developed and/or improved in as a result of their time spent at TPHS. Table 4.6 below provides a summary of the students' responses.

Table 4.6: TPHS's contribution towards students' holistic development

Factors contributing to holistic development	Very much	Much	Not much	Not at all
Acquiring a broad general education	27.66%	61.7%	10.64%	0%
Acquiring job-related skills	46.81%	46.81%	6.38%	0%
Writing clearly and effectively	8.51%	61.7%	27.66%	2.13%
Speaking clearly and effectively	12.77%	63.83%	23.4%	0%
Thinking critically and analytically	25.53%	57.45%	14.89%	2.13%
Solving problems	23.4%	63.83%	12.77%	0%
Using computers	21.28%	29.79%	40.43%	8.51%
Working effectively with others	29.79%	57.45%	12.77%	0%
Learning effectively on your own	29.79%	51.06%	19.15%	0%
Understanding yourself	34.04%	40.43%	23.4%	2.13%
Understanding other people and cultures	46.81%	44.68%	4.26%	4.26%
Developing personal values and ethics	23.4%	55.32%	21.28%	0%

Becoming a socially responsible citizen	27.66%	53.19%	19.15%	0%
Developing career goals	48.94%	38.3%	10.64%	2.13%
Gathering information on career opportunities	48.94%	38.3%	12.77%	0%

From Table 4.6 one may deduct that the students of TPHS agree that the institution had helped them to develop in the following areas (the first two response categories were combined to provide a joint percentage point): acquiring a broad general education (89.36%), acquiring job-related skills (93.62%), writing clearly and effectively (70.21%), speaking clearly and effectively (76.6%), thinking critically and analytically (82.98%), solving problems (87.23%), using computers (51.07%), working effectively with others (87.24%), learning effectively on their own (80.85%), understanding themselves (74.47%), developing personal values and ethics (78.72%), becoming a socially responsible citizen (80.85%), developing career goals (87.24%) and gathering information on career opportunities (87.24%). The skills areas listed in Table 4.6 were considered important aspects of students' holistic development as based on the SASSE (UFS, 2013) framework. Considering holistic development as an element of student success, one might deduct that these areas are considered important to many higher education institutions as fostering student success is at the centre of their mission (Nauffal, 2012). This is also true at TPHS. Against the backdrop of the accountability of a private higher education provider mentioned in Chapter 2 it is important that TPHS receive positive ratings in terms of holistic student development such as those outlined in Table 4.6. Embedded in the TPHS mission statement is to develop each student in more areas than cognitive ability including the various student attributes required to create a professional hospitality employee. At TPHS a high premium is placed on aspects such as professionalism and respect, grooming them for a demanding and ever-changing hospitality industry.

4.2.1.5 Academic focus and commitment

The fifth section of the student questionnaire contained one question that required students to indicate how much time they spent on various activities during an

average term week. These activities and the rate of involvement are indicated in Figures 4.11 to 4.20 below.

4.2.1.5.1 Preparing for class

Figure 4.11 represents the number of hours students spent on preparing for class.

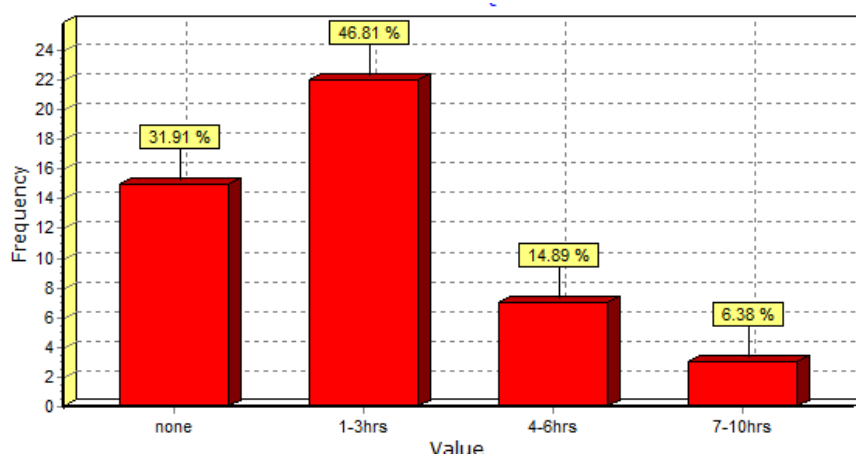


Figure 4.11: Allocation of time to class preparation

From Figure 4.11 it is evident that 46.81% of the students spent only one to three hours on class preparation per week while 31.91% of students admitted that they did not spend any time preparing for class. One might argue that students should spend optimum time preparing for class as this may positively influence their grades (Kuh, 2007). The importance of class preparation is emphasised by Carini *et al.* (2006) who state that the more students study or practise a subject, the more they tend to learn about it. Cruce *et al.* (2008) consider preparing for class an educationally purposeful activity and Laird *et al.* (2009) add that for students to be successful they must spend time on class preparation activities.

4.2.1.5.2 Working to earn money while studying

Figure 4.12 indicates how many of the students worked to earn money while completing their studies and, if so, how many hours per week were taken up by such work responsibilities.

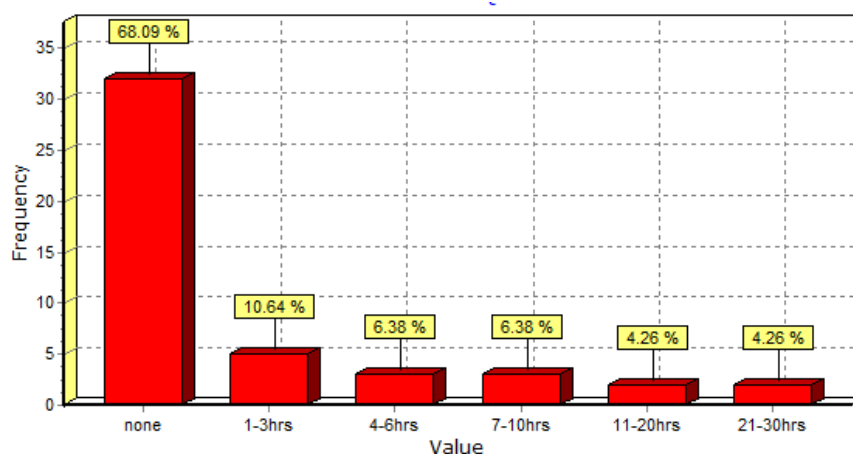


Figure 4.12: Time students spent working per week to earn money

Figure 4.12 indicates that the majority of students (68.09%) did not work to earn money while they were completing their studies. It is important to take note that more than a quarter of the students (31.91%) did indeed work to earn money – some (4.26%) for as much as 30 hours per week. These students may require additional assistance with their academic work and have to be aware that they can request academic assistance if needed to reduce their risk of failure. Once their employment situation is known, the progress of such students could be closely monitored (Kuh, 2007).

4.2.1.5.3 Participating in TPHS activities other than attending class

Figure 4.13 shows the amount of time the students spent on participating in TPHS activities apart from attending classes.

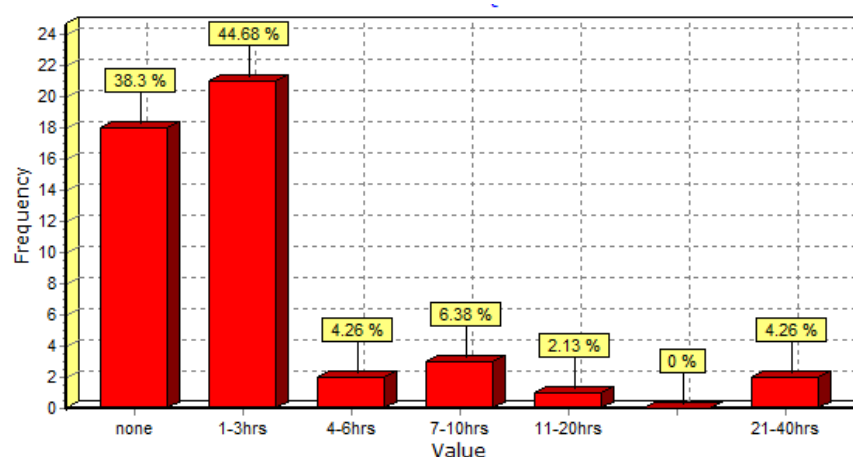


Figure 4.13: Time students spent participating in activities other than attending class per week

Figure 4.13 shows that many of the students (44.68%) spent only between one and three hours per week partaking in TPHS activities other than attending class. More than a third (38.3%) indicated that they spent no time on such activities. Participating in out-of-class activities can be important in fostering a feeling of cohesion and belonging at a higher education institution and are vital for student engagement (Van Uden *et al.*, 2013:44).

4.2.1.5.4 Providing care for another person

Figure 4.14 indicates how many of the students were responsible for taking care of other people (dependants) while they were studying.

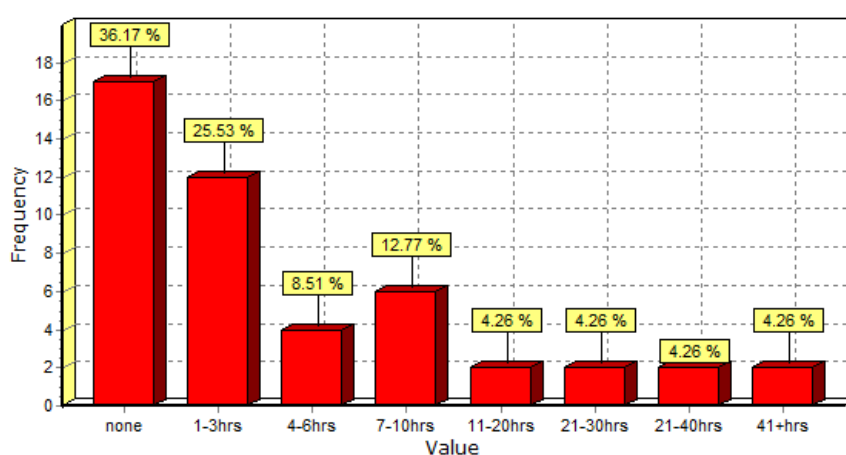


Figure 4.14: Time students spent taking care of others per week

From Figure 4.14 one can see that 36.17% of the students did not spend any time caring for people who are dependent on them. However, those who do have such a responsibility (63.83%) may require additional support, whether academic or otherwise. It thus seems important to take note of students' personal circumstances as it may influence their ability to spend sufficient amounts of time on their studies (Kuh, 2007).

4.2.1.5.5 Travelling to and from class

Figure 4.15 indicates the amount of time the students spent travelling to and from class. The means of transportation was not inquired into.

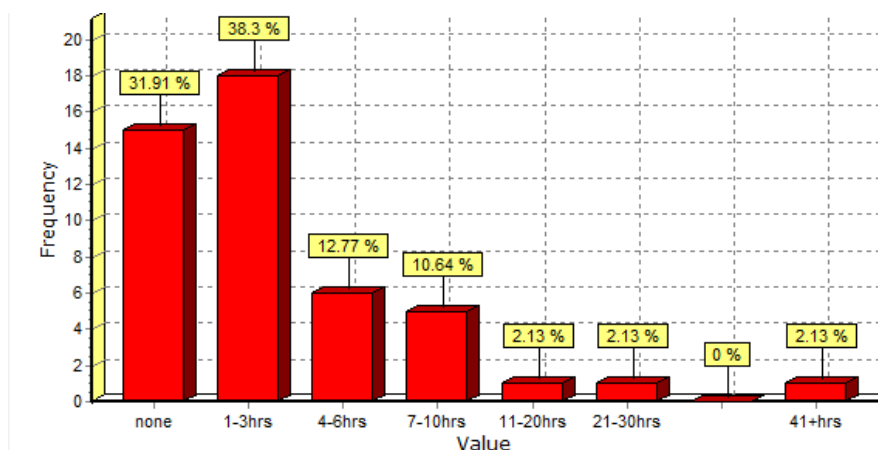


Figure 4.15: Students' travelling time to and from class per week

One may assume that the students who spent no time travelling to and from class (31.91%), as indicated in Figure 4.15, were those living in on-campus residence at TPHS. However the residence can only accommodate 18 students. Those spending only between one and three hours per week for travelling (38.3%) were most likely living in Stellenbosch and surrounds. This factor may influence students' time available to engage outside of the classroom as those taking a long time to travel home will have less time and energy to spend on studying or completing assignments (Kuh, 2007). Jacoby's (1989) views also illustrate that higher education has long since been aware of the effects of commuting to and from class on students' time and energy available to invest in their studies and that more effort should be made to support such students.

4.2.1.5.6 Studying for tests

Table 4.16 shows the amount of time per week the students spent studying for tests during a typical week.

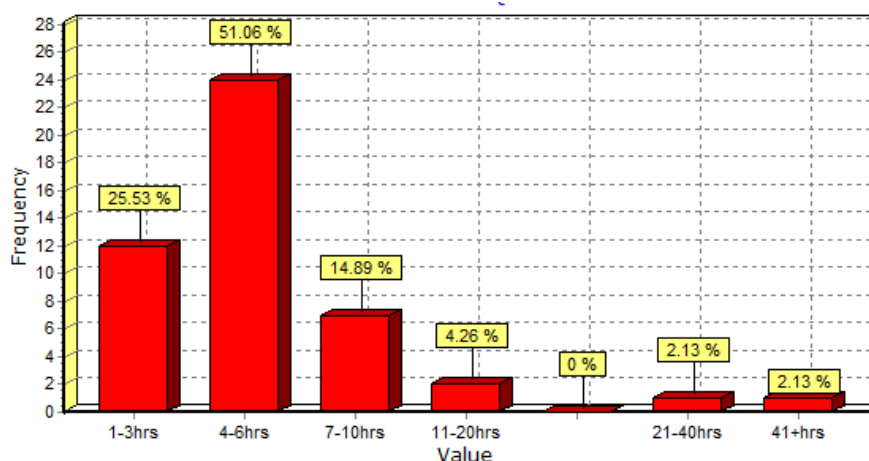


Figure 4.16: Time students spent studying for tests per week

The data shown in Figure 4.16 indicate that 51.06% of students spent four to six hours during a typical week studying for tests. Carini *et al.*s. (2006) claim that the more students study or practise a subject, the more they tend to learn and perform applies here as well. In a study conducted by Cruce *et al.* (2008), a positive link was identified between spending more time studying as an educationally purposeful activity and student success.

4.2.1.5.7 Completing assignments

Figure 4.17 indicates how much time the students spent on completing assignments per week.

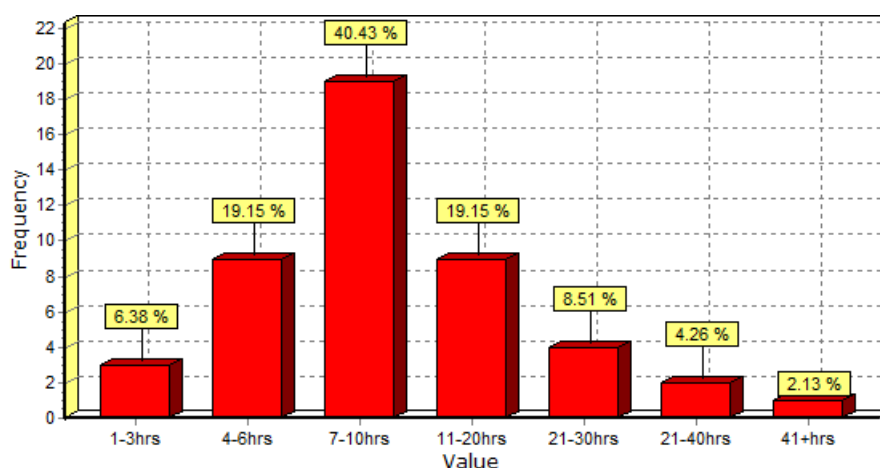


Figure 4.17: Time students spent on completing assignments per week

Figure 4.17 shows that 40.43% of students spent up to 10 hours per week completing assignments. Since assignments are meant to inform and facilitate the

learning of theory and help students to better understand the subject content, Carini *et al's.* (2006) claim that the more students study or practise a subject, the more they tend to learn and perform well in it may also apply here (Kuh, 2007).

4.2.1.5.8 Socialising with friends

Table 4.18 indicates the time the students allocated to socialising with their friends during a typical week.

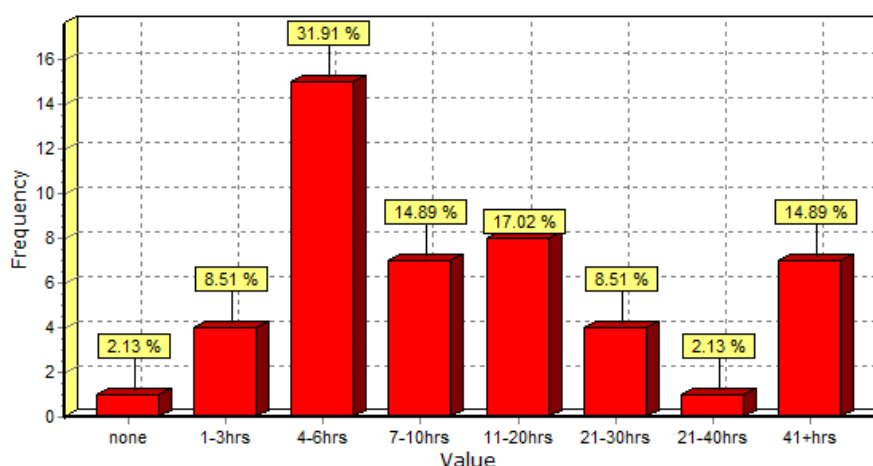


Figure 4.18: Time students spent socialising with friends per week

The amount of time the students spent on socialising with friends, as shown in Table 4.18, seems varied. This question was included so that social engagement could be compared to engagements related to the students' studies. The snap judgement would be to say that the students devoted more time to social engagements unrelated to their studies than they did on activities that made them engage with their course. This deduction may be validated by considering the students' low response rates to the engagement activities summarised in Table 4.2, which include not preparing for class (40.43%), working on projects with peers (34.04%), acting as a mentor for another student (31.92%), preparing draft versions of assignments (25.53%) and not submitting assignments on time (17.03%). It is important to acknowledge social engagement as a strong element of students' development and success (Terenzini & Wright, 1987; Yorke & Longden, 2004; Anon, 2014b) and something not to be taken lightly by institutions of higher education.

4.2.1.5.9 Exercising

Figure 4.19 indicates the amount of time the students spent on physical exercise per week.

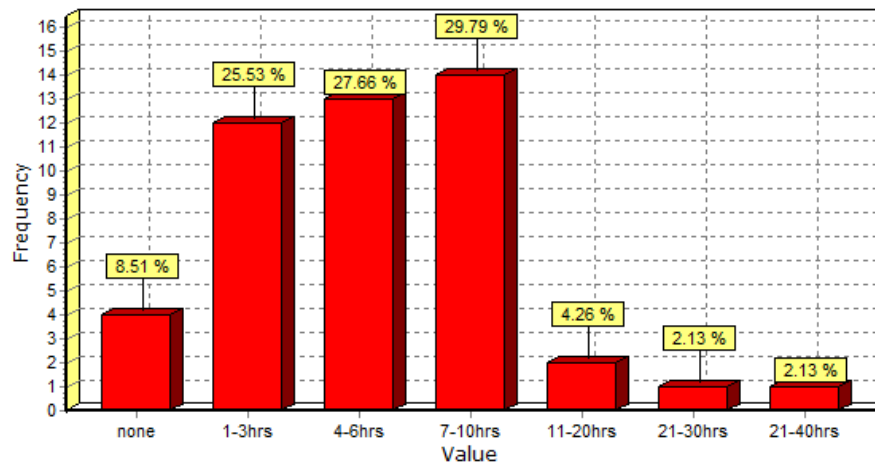


Figure 4.19: Time students spent exercising per week

Figure 4.19 indicates that the majority of the students spent time exercising, which seems positive as physical exercise can aid mental health and wellbeing, which can in turn enable students to perform better at their studies (Reynolds, 2013).

4.2.1.5.10 Sleeping

Figure 4.20 shows the time the students allocated to sleeping per week.

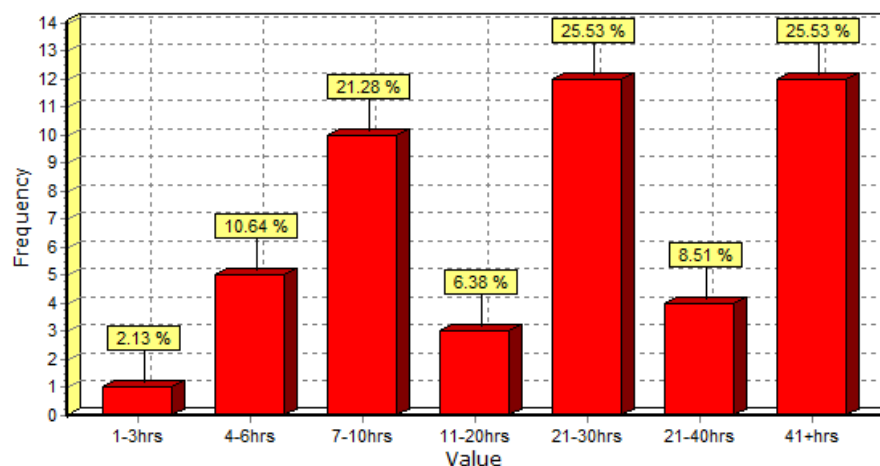


Figure 4.20: Time students spent sleeping per week

Getting enough sleep is important for brain function and general wellbeing (Harvard Medical School, 2007b). Considering that the norm is to get approximately eight

hours of sleep per night, one may deduct from Figure 4.20 that the majority of students did not seem to be sleeping enough. Information on factors that prevented them from getting adequate sleep was not required but the literature reports that factors often responsible for lack of sleep include shift work, pain, anxiety, caffeine consumption, alcohol consumption and the sleep environment (Harvard Medical School, 2007a).

The findings of the student questionnaires were presented in this section. The demographic information revealed that the average TPHS student is a school leaver who starts studying immediately after high school. She is female, enrolled for the full-time two-year qualification, white, English-speaking and unmarried. The section on students' perceptions of student engagement indicated that students at TPHS mostly feel positive about student engagement and although they agree that TPHS aims to encourage engagement practices, they would like more engagement opportunities to be created. Students reported positive feelings towards other entities at TPHS, such as their peers, lecturers, and support staff, and they responded positively to all areas listed indicating TPHS's contribution to skills development in these areas. Time allocation to various activities that make up students' everyday lives was also reported. The next section contains the results and discussion of the staff questionnaires.

4.2.2 Staff questionnaires

All five questionnaires distributed to staff were returned. The questionnaires consisted of four sections, namely (1) demographic information, (2) staff perceptions of student engagement (SE), (3) use of SE practices, and (4) prioritising SE. The results from each of these sections are presented and discussed next.

4.2.2.1 Demographic information

Of the five lecturers who participated in the study, two were between 25 and 31 years of age, one between 32 and 38 and two between 46 and 52. The qualifications of the lecturers were as follows: one held a diploma in culinary arts, another held a BComm degree in investment management as well as a diploma in culinary arts, another held a BComm degree in hospitality management, another held a master's degree in industrial psychology and another a doctorate in tourism and events

management. Two were males and three females. Their experience ranged from nearly two years to more than 30 years.

4.2.2.2 Staff's perceptions of student engagement

Table 4.7 summarises lecturers' perceptions of student engagement.

Table 4.7: Academic staff's perceptions of student engagement (N=5)

Statement about student engagement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Student engagement is valuable in higher education	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Students naturally engage in the classroom	0%	20%	0%	0%	80%
Students seek opportunities to engage outside of the classroom	0%	60%	0%	40%	0%
Student engagement is a priority for me as an educator	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Barriers exist that sometimes prevent me from actively encouraging engagement	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Students will engage even if lecturers do not facilitate the opportunities to do so	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%
The current generation of students demand a different approach to teaching and learning	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
I am familiar with various ways of promoting engagement in and out of the classroom	20%	60%	20%	0%	0%
I use a variety of tools to actively facilitate engagement	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%

The degree to which students engage is influenced by their relationship with their educator	40%	20%	20%	0%	0%
Students are required to do some sort of preparation before my classes	20%	60%	0%	40%	0%
Students can make an appointment to consult me outside of class time	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%
Student engagement can aid in student success	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
When I was studying I was heavily engaged in my studies	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%

From Table 4.7 it can be deduced that all the lecturers at TPHS agreed that student engagement is valuable in higher education and that it is important to engage students in their own learning. However, not all agreed that students are naturally engaging nor that they seek engagement opportunities inside (80% disagree) the classroom, but 60% argued that students engage outside the classroom. The rating of engagement in the classroom supports the notion that educators play a major role in facilitating engagement (Cruce *et al.*, 2008:541; Henning, 2012; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012; Strom & Strom 2013:54; Zepke *et al.*, 2014). All the lecturers agreed that there are barriers that hinder engagement and they recognise that the current generation of students may require a different approach by staff to teaching and learning (De Frondeville, 2009; Anon, 2014a). Four out of the five lecturers reported that they are familiar with various ways of promoting student engagement and all five indicated that they use a variety of tools with the aim of actively facilitating engagement. Variety in teaching to enhance student engagement is also strongly supported in the literature (Smith *et al.*, 2005:1; Westerman 2007). Staff mostly (4 out of 5) acknowledged that students' degree of engagement can be influenced by the relationship with their lecturers and all the lecturers reported that they are available for consultation if needed, which echoes the views expressed in relevant literature,

such as the perspectives of Krumrei-Mancuso *et al.* (2013), Fletcher (2014) and Zepke *et al.*'s (2014) who all emphasise a supportive learning environment. All lecturers agreed that effective student engagement can aid overall student success (also see Kinzie & Kuh, 2004:3; Kuh *et al.*, 2005; Carini *et al.*, 2006:23; Kuh, 2007; Cruce *et al.*, 2008; Nauffal, 2012:173; Hallinger & Lu, 2013:595). In view of the lecturers' relatively positive perceptions of the value of student engagement, the following section will focus on lecturers' use of various tools in the classroom that may or may not promote student engagement.

4.2.2.3 Use of engagement practices

Table 4.8 indicates which classroom activities the lecturers used and how often such activities were used.

Table 4.8: Lecturers' in-class activities that may facilitate student engagement

Activity	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
PowerPoint presentations	60%	20%	20%	0%
Video clips	20%	40%	20%	20%
Whiteboard / flipchart	20%	80%	0%	0%
Class discussions	60%	40%	0%	0%
Problem solving	20%	80%	0%	0%
Debates	20%	60%	20%	0%
Blogging	0%	0%	40%	60%

From Table 4.8 it is clear that the students at TPHS are exposed to a variety of activities in the classroom. Lecturers all indicated that they make use of PowerPoint presentations, yet to varying degrees. In my opinion, PowerPoint presentations can potentially create a barrier between the lecturer and the student (disengage students from learning) as students may either focus too much on the visuals or they may try to copy everything from the slides. Thus they may not pay sufficient attention to the

lecturer's teaching and explanation. All lecturers, except one, used video clips. Considering the characteristics of the current generation in terms of their technological inclination (McGrath, 2014) and in view of Wolpert-Gawron's (2012) opinion that visual aids in the classroom promote engagement, visual aids such as video clips and PowerPoint presentations may increase students' interest in the topic as well as their motivation to participate in discussions or other engagement activities. All the lecturers wrote on the whiteboard or a flipchart. This may prove beneficial as it keeps students' attention, because the lecturer does not talk all the time, but utilises various activities as suggested by Westerman (2007). This approach can also be of benefit to those students with visual learning preferences. All the lecturers reported that they use problem solving as a teaching technique. Again, referring to the literature on what engages the current generation of students as explained by Smith *et al.* (2012), problem solving activities stimulate student learning. All lecturers reported using debates, however to varying degrees. Debates are also advantageous in view of the current student generation's preferences, as they appreciate opportunities to express their opinions (Westerman, 2007) and this may encourage increased engagement which may, in turn, lead to greater self-confidence. Blogging does not seem to be a popular activity among lecturers, yet it is suggested by Wolpert-Gawron (2012) as an effective engagement activity.

4.2.2.4 Prioritising student engagement

Table 4.9 indicates what the lecturers spent most of their time on during an average working day.

Table 4.9: Lecturers' division of working day priorities

Priority	Very little	Little	Moderate	Much	Very much
Preparing for lectures	0%	40%	40%	0%	20%
Teaching	0%	20%	0%	40%	40%
Setting tests and examinations	20%	40%	20%	20%	0%
Setting assignments	20%	40%	20%	20%	0%

Marking tests and examinations	20%	0%	40%	40%	0%
Marking assignments	0%	20%	40%	20%	20%
Administration	20%	0%	20%	40%	20%
Student consultation	40%	40%	0%	20%	0%
Operational duties	60%	0%	0%	20%	20%

From Table 4.9 it can be seen that one lecturer reported spending a great deal of time on preparation while the other four indicated that they spend moderate to little amounts of time preparing for lectures. This may be due to the fact that all the lecturers had been offering the subjects they were then offering for at least three semesters, therefore they may be familiar with the content and need less preparation time. It can also be deduced from Table 4.9 that most lecturers (4 out of 5) stated that they spend much or very much of their time teaching while one stated that little time is spent on teaching. Setting tests and examinations as well as assignments seemed to take much time for one lecturer, a moderate amount of time for another and little to very little time for the other three. Marking tests and examinations are reported to take much time for two lecturers, a moderate amount of time for another two and very little time for one, while marking assignments takes much to very much time for two lecturers, a moderate amount of time for two others and little for another. Administrative duties seem to take much to very much time for three of the lecturers while one reported that it takes a moderate amount of time and another that it takes little time. Only one lecturer reported to spend much time on student consultation while the other four reported to spend little to very little time on student consultation. Three of the five lecturers reported spending very little time on operational duties while one reported spending much and another spending very much time on such duties. When considering the findings reported in Table 4.9 one must bear in mind that the different lecturers had different lecture loads as well as different levels of experience. Some lecturers also carried operational or managerial loads in addition to their lecturing, which may explain some of the trends in the amount of time spent

on the activities as were listed. In addition, the duties and responsibilities of each staff member of TPHS are determined by a workload policy at TPHS.

From the findings reported from the staff questionnaires, one might deduct that lecturers at TPHS support student engagement as a means of enhancing student success and that they undertake some activities in their classes to promote engagement. There are, however, other responsibilities that may influence and at times limit the amount of time and effort that can be devoted to promoting student engagement.

The next section focusses on the results and discussion of the student focus group interviews as well as individual interviews with staff.

4.3 Interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 3, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two student focus groups. Individual interviews with the five TPHS staff members were also conducted. The results of the interviews with students (section 4.3.1) and staff (section 4.3.2) are discussed next.

4.3.1 Student focus group interviews

Participating students were divided into two focus groups consisting of four students each. The interview process was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The following categories emerged from the student focus group interviews: (a) factors that engage students, (b) factors that disengage students, (c) student attitudes towards engagement, and (d) the lecturer's role in engagement. A discussion of the interview results is provided next. Finally, each conceptual category with related themes that emerged from the interviews will be discussed.

4.3.1.1 Interviews with student focus groups

Two groups of four students each were interviewed. Respondents 1–4 (R1–R4) were in the first group and respondents 5–8 (R5–R8) were in the second group. The results from the two focus group interviews will be discussed separately. Refer to Addendum C for an example of transcribed interviews.

4.3.1.1.1 Interview with Focus Group 1

The first question was: “*What factors make you want to engage more in the classroom?*” The consensus among the group members was that lecturers create opportunities for engagement by directing questions at students in class and allowing students to think for themselves and arrive at an appropriate answer. Students enjoy opportunities to break up into smaller groups and discuss a topic with their peers. The group also indicated that students welcome the opportunity to engage with technology during classes and want lecturers to afford them such opportunities more often. One respondent added that she is more likely to engage in a topic that she perceives as interesting, which led to the group discussing their specialisation (hospitality management or culinary arts); also how their interest in the various subjects is stimulated by relating their learning to their chosen area of specialisation. Another aspect that was seen to encourage engagement is the manner in which the class is offered by the lecturer. One participant voiced this as follows: “If the lecturer is enthusiastic and moves around it is easier to pay attention and become engaged.”

The second question was: “*What factors make you want to engage less in the classroom?*” The group members immediately agreed that students stop engaging if the topic of discussion is drawn out or too lengthy. If this happens, students become bored and lose focus. Another factor that hinders concentration, and therefore engagement, was identified as lecturers speaking in monotone. A final remark of one student to this question was that she is less likely to engage if the lecturer does not present opportunities to answer direct questions.

The third question was: “*Do you engage more in some classes than others?*” All the respondents agreed that they did indeed engage more in some classes than in others. When asked why, they provided various explanations. Student R1 repeated a previous point that students engage more in a class if the subject matter relates directly to their area of specialisation; for example, a chef student will engage more in a culinary class. The discussion also went back to the previous point, namely that engagement depends greatly on the degree to which lecturers encourage and create opportunities for engagement. The group agreed that a smaller and more intimate class environment leads to better engagement. The group added that visual aids

such as pictures and video clips help students maintain attention and lead to better engagement.

The last question was: “*Describe an ideal class.*” From the group members’ responses, it is evident that factors that make a class ideal include student involvement in discussions; however, contributions should be meaningful, otherwise students become irritated and disengaged. An ideal class should also have breaks in between where students are allowed to leave the classroom as it is difficult to concentrate for an extended period of time. Other physiological factors such as hunger were also identified as factors that can influence students’ concentration and engagement.

4.3.1.1.2 Interview with Focus Group 2

In response to the first question, “*What factors make you want to engage more in the classroom?*” the group agreed that students are more likely to engage in smaller classes where they know the other students and feel comfortable about expressing their opinions or asking questions. Students will also engage more if they are familiar with the topic and have existing background knowledge in order to contribute to discussions. Student R5 added that the participation mark assigned to all modules at TPHS encourages students to participate. The participation mark is a marking rule category assigned to each subject which awards students marks for their participation in class. Participation is considered to be asking questions, answering questions and interacting with peers, to name a few examples.

In response to the second question, “*What factors may you want to engage less in the classroom?*” the group agreed that students sometimes do not want to engage with peers, because they rather want the lecturer to explain the work because if the lecturer explains it, they accept it as the correct information. Students also sometimes refrain from volunteering to answer as they do not want to be labelled by peers as a “know-it-all” student. Students will also not participate if they have a negative relationship with their peers or lecturer. One foreign student (R6) added that foreign students whose first language is not English sometimes refrain from taking part in discussions, because they are not comfortable about expressing themselves in another language. Since this was a response from only one student, this did not

inform this study. This group also pointed out that students refrain from taking part in engagement activities if they do not have any interest in the topic or the subject altogether – then they will merely try to pass the tests and examination. Another aspect that was mentioned as a potential barrier to students' willingness to engage was identified as their mood or personality; it so happens that some students may simply be not in the mood to participate on a particular day or that they have a more introvert personality and do not want to be exposed. All participants in this group agreed that they sometimes do not answer a question in class as they are afraid of providing the wrong answer. They therefore do not always see the classroom as an environment in which it is safe to make mistakes.

To the third question, "*Do you engage more in some classes than others?*" this group also responded by agreeing that students will engage more when class groups are smaller. They added that the layout of the class also has an impact on participation and engagement; for example, students will engage more in a boardroom or round table setting where they can see each other than in a classroom in which the seating is organised in rows. Another aspect related to varying levels of engagement in classes is students' relationships with and views of the lecturer. If lecturers allow opportunities for discussion, ask questions, appear friendly and encouraging and students are not intimidated by the lecturer, engagement is more likely to take place.

In responding to the last question, "*Describe an ideal class*", the group indicated a number of characteristics. For instance, one respondent indicated that a class has been ideal if you leave it knowing you have covered relevant and important information that is essential to tests and examinations. Another response was that the atmosphere should be comfortable and the lecturer should listen to students. It was emphasised that when lecturers use examples from real-world situations and professional experience, it helps students to better understand and remember information. Students also want to move around in class and not just sit still all the time; they also want lecturers to move around while teaching as this keeps the students' attention.

In view of the data generated from the student focus group interviews presented in sections 4.3.1.1.1 and 4.3.1.1.2, the findings of the interviews will be discussed in

the next section. I will indicate how they correspond with the literature perspectives provided in Chapter 2.

4.3.1.1.3 Factors that engage students

From the focus group interviews the main factors that seem to engage students are questions directed at students, lecturer enthusiasm and how interesting or relevant the topic is. The prominent focus on the lecturer as the only one responsible for promoting engagement (as indicated by the students who participated in the focus groups) is in contrast with research by Laird, Smallwood, Niskodè-Dossett and Garver (2009:73) who explain that when educators take sole responsibility for student engagement it does not have an optimal effect. It should thus be noted that student engagement is a shared responsibility between students and educators (Cruce *et al.*, 2008:541; Henning, 2012; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012; Strom & Strom 2013:54; Zepke *et al.*, 2014). The group interview findings may thus indicate that students do not always accept the responsibility for facilitating and promoting their own engagement. In the final analysis active learning is the student's responsibility as no-one can learn on behalf of the student. The lecturer's role in facilitating engagement is discussed further in section 5.2.1.5.

4.3.1.1.4 Factors that disengage students

From the focus group interviews it became evident that boredom (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Fletcher, 2014) and lack of opportunities for engagement mainly contribute to the disengagement of these students. This finding relates to views from the literature indicating that students who become disengaged withdraw and show little or no enthusiasm (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Anon, 2014b; Fletcher, 2014). Disengaged students are thus passive, they do not apply themselves, they are often depressed or anxious about being in a classroom and tend to give up easily when presented with a challenge (Lopez, 2011; Reyes *et al.*, 2012; Fletcher, 2014).

4.3.1.1.5 Student attitudes

Student attitudes were included as a category, because as the interviews were conducted various indicators of student attitudes emerged. One such attitude that

was unobtrusively perceived is the desire students have for lecturers to include aspects of their (the students') everyday life into the classroom. This aspect was illustrated by statements such as: "Lecturers must allow me to use my phone to quickly find information," indicating their technological orientation. This trend is confirmed by several authors (Collins & Tilson, 2001:174; Westerman, 2007; Herbison & Boseman, 2009:33; Trent, 2010:13; Twenge, 2013:66). Another attitude noticed is one of students wanting to dictate how they engage. Statements such as: "My mood influences whether I engage" and "I only engage when I am interested in the topic" point to contemporary students' sense of empowerment. This tendency, which is confirmed by authors such as Herbison and Boseman (2009:33) and Twenge (2009:399), corresponds with what Westerman (2007) says about students not always being willing to adapt to the environment in which they find themselves, but rather expect the environment to adapt to them. Another attitude that was observed from the student participants is one of insecurity as students stated that they will only engage if they are comfortable with the lecturer and peers and that they are scared to provide the incorrect answer and face mockery – in which case they would rather refrain from answering a question. This links with what has been reported in student engagement research, namely that students engage more if they find themselves in a comfortable environment, free of judgement and potential ridicule (Anon, 2014b).

4.3.1.1.6 Lecturers' roles in engagement

From the focus group interviews it became clear that students place much emphasis on their lecturers' behaviour and how it affects their potential to engage. Students expect the lecturer to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, move around in class, listen to students, use visual aids, give breaks and keep class discussions relevant. These findings correspond with what is reported in the literature, namely that students are more likely to engage when lecturers are enthusiastic (Wolpert-Gawron, 2012), knowledgeable in their subject areas (Zepke *et al.*, 2014) and interactive in class (Whitt *et al.* 2008). De Frondeville (2009) also found that encouraging physical movement and listening to students correspond with students' need to have their voices heard (Fletcher, 2014). Wolpert-Gawron (2012) indicates that it is beneficial to use visual aids and modern technology. Furthermore, keeping discussions relevant

links to Westerman's (2007) explanation that the current generation wants to understand the significance of what they are studying before they will engage.

4.3.2 Staff interviews

The five staff members of TPHS were each asked two questions. Seeing that there were only five participants, their responses were recorded verbatim and are presented. The two questions asked to staff are: (a) What is your view on student engagement? and (b) How do you think student engagement is best facilitated?

4.3.2.1 Academic staff's views on student engagement

The first question of the individual staff interviews asked staff to explain their views on student engagement. Below are examples of their responses.

Respondent 1 (R1) said: "It is important to be actively involved in what you are studying as it creates an in-depth understanding and creates a love for what you do." This response clearly relates to Garrett's (2011) work which indicates that deep learning is achieved through engagement and therefore students who are engaged in their learning may learn faster and in greater depth than those who are not engaged. Respondent 2 (R2) took an alternative perspective by responding: "I think that some students will value it, but some won't. Some students need time and silence to absorb certain concepts [while] others need active engagement." This response resonates with the opinion of Zepke *et al.* (2014) who claim that students are different and therefore the way in which they engage may be different (also see Morgan, 2014:34). R2 further illustrated this point by continuing to say, "It will also differ according to subject matter, cognitive ability and also critical thinking ability. Some students want physical engagement as well (hugs)." It may thus be important for educators to be aware of students' diverse needs and preferences to effectively engage all students (Morgan, 2014:34; Patterson, 2014). The response from Respondent 3 (R3) clearly links to that of R2: "Students need to be engaged on their level. Higher education should incorporate the current generation's lifestyle. Look at flexi-time for classes. Use technology." This response highlights that the current generation of students require a different approach to teaching and learning (Anon, 2014a). Respondent 4 (R4) emphasised the importance of student engagement by answering, "Absolutely necessary, the best way to measure students' progress and

understanding. Students get the chance to reflect and hear different viewpoints.” The matter of reflection mentioned by R4 supports De Frondeville’s (2009) suggestion that reflection is a positive and engaging learning activity for students as well as Kuh’s (2009) argument that engagement offers feedback and reflective opportunities through which students’ progress can be monitored. Out of the five staff members, Respondent 5 (R5) was the only one with a seemingly negative perspective as displayed by the response that “[s]tudents are lazy in general. They want everything done for them. They expect to do the minimum work and pass.” Although negative, this response corresponds with some of the negative characteristics mentioned about the current generation, including their tendency towards narcissism, arrogance, impatience, incuriosity and lack of motivation (Westerman, 2007; McGrath, 2014) as well as findings by Westerman (2007) and Kane (2014) that current students today want to be praised for their efforts, even if they have not made much effort.

4.3.2.2 Facilitating student engagement

The second question of the individual staff interviews inquired how staff thought student engagement is best facilitated.

Respondent 1 (R1) said, “More practical scenarios and active participations should be involved in sessions that are linked to real actions on the ‘outside’ of the classroom.” This statement corresponds with findings by Smith *et al.* (2012), namely that creating real-life situations where students can practise practical applications of theory results in productive learning. Respondent 2 (R2) replied, “The educator must know how to ‘read’ each student and facilitate engagement in more than one way.” This view corresponds with Wolpert-Gawron’s (2012) findings from research on the effectiveness of a wide variety of facilitation activities. R2 added, “However, this is only really possible in smaller groups.” From the student focus group interviews it also became apparent that the students preferred smaller groups that support more meaningful interaction, as further indicated by lecturer R2: “In large groups the educator can engage only with those that engage themselves. By actively trying to engage the backrow sitters attention is placed on them and may just ignore the engagement opportunity or ‘freeze’.” This observation may refer to the negative

nature of disengaged students as outlined by Lopez (2011), Reyes *et al.* (2012) and Fletcher (2014), who explain that such disengaged students are passive, do not apply themselves, and are often bored and depressed or anxious about being in a classroom. The third lecturer (R3) indicated ways of facilitating engagement as follows: “Activities. Having students do ‘homework’ in class. Require of them to read wider than their prescribed textbooks.” These suggestions correspond with some of De Frondeville’s (2009) steps on how to actively engage students, such as using movement, role play and bringing variety into the classroom. Respondent 4 (R4) said that the best way to facilitate engagement is to “[be] attentive, make and keep students interested in the topic discussed. Use examples from industry, bring in the latest trends and discuss reality – apply knowledge from [text]book with industry.” This response matched R1’s response and ties in with perspectives such as that of Smith *et al.* (2012) who advocate for linking theory to real-life situations. R4’s response is also in line with student focus group results from which it became clear that students are more likely to engage if they are interested in a topic or subject. The fifth lecturer’s (R5) response was again somewhat negative as it indicated ways to facilitate student engagement as “[f]orcing interaction, pop-quizzes, calling students out to explain concepts. Interactive practical [classes].” This might be contradictory to Westerman’s (2007) view that students enjoy classes that are flexible and fun where they can voice their meaning in a comfortable and safe environment.

From the individual interviews with the five academic staff at TPHS it became clear that they have a relatively good understanding of student engagement and that they are mindful of creating opportunities for student engagement, particularly as it relates to increased student success. Positive aspects that emerged from the interviews include references to in-depth understanding and reflection. However, the lecturers also realise that different students engage in different ways and determining such preferences may be possible within smaller classes. Some negative characteristics as perceived by a staff member emerged which corresponds with the literature perspectives on the current generation of students. Such negative characteristics may be acknowledged and managed rather than seen as a barrier to engagement. In terms of facilitating student engagement, aspects that emerged were creating

opportunities to relate theory to real-life situations, recognising student differences and teaching and engaging students in different ways, using a variety of activities and physical movement in the class, and stimulating interest among students in a topic or subject.

In the following section some conclusions are drawn from this chapter.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter contains the findings of the study. Data generated from questionnaires and interviews were presented and links were made to relevant literature as explored in Chapter 2. My summative conclusions on the findings as they emerged from the questionnaire and interview data are discussed in the final sections.

4.4.1 Findings on TPHS students

The demographic information on student participants indicates that the typical TPHS student is a school leaver who starts studying immediately after Grade 12. She is female, enrolled for the full-time two-year qualification, white, English-speaking and unmarried. Students mostly feel positive about engaging in their own learning and they acknowledge the attempts made by lecturers and the institution to encourage engagement practices. However, they would like more engagement opportunities to be created. In terms of relationships with other entities at TPHS, students have positive attitudes towards their peers, lecturers and support staff. From a list containing areas of development, students provided positive ratings to all areas indicating that they felt that TPHS had contributed to their development in all the listed areas. The areas that students awarded especially high ratings were (from highest to lowest) acquiring job-related skills (93.62%), acquiring a broad general education (89.36%), developing career goals (87.24%), gathering information on career opportunities (87.24%), working effectively with others (87.24%), solving problems (87.23%), thinking critically and analytically (82.98%), becoming a socially responsible citizen (80.85%) and learning effectively on their own (80.85%). The lowest rating was given to developing computer skills (51.07%). Time allocations to various activities that make up students' everyday lives were also reported. These time allocations indicated that about a third (31.91%) of the students spent no time

preparing for class, more than two thirds (68.09%) did not work for money while they were studying, only 36.17% did not have to care for another person while they were studying, about a third (31.91%) of the students spent no time travelling to and from classes, more than half of the students spent more than four hours per week studying for tests, the average time spent completing assignments was between 4 and 20 hours. The same statistic as the latter applies for socialising with friends, and the majority of students indicated that they do exercise and get enough sleep.

Activities that particularly engage students in their own learning are directed questions, lecturer enthusiasm and interesting or relevant topics. Factors that mostly hinder engagement are boredom and lack of opportunities for engagement. Students also want to have aspects of their everyday life, such as the use of cell phones, included in their classroom learning and it appears that some students want to dictate how they engage and when. I, as the researcher, unobtrusively perceived a sense of insecurity in some of the students. Students seemed to place much emphasis on their lecturers' behaviour and how it affects their potential or willingness to engage. To enhance engagement students expect lecturers to be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, move around in class, listen to students, use visual aids, give breaks and keep class discussions relevant.

4.4.2 Findings on TPHS academic staff

Lecturer characteristics at TPHS vary in terms of age, qualifications and level and years of experience. They support student engagement as a means of enhancing student success and they report on activities that promote engagement which they employ or try to employ on a regular basis.

All five lecturing staff showed a good understanding of student engagement and they were well aware of the need to promote student engagement actively as it relates positively to students success. The lecturers realised that different students engage in different ways and inquiry into distinguishing such preferences and responding accordingly may be useful. Some negative characteristics of present-day students as perceived by at least one lecturer emerged, which corresponds with literature perspectives on the current generation of students. Concerning facilitating student engagement, aspects that emerged were creating opportunities to relate theory to

real-life situations, recognising student differences and thus teaching and engaging students in different ways, using a variety of activities and some physical movement in the class, and stimulating interest among students in a topic or subject.

From sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 above it is clear that both students and staff at TPHS favour student engagement and that creating more opportunities for engagement may be a positive feature of future teaching and learning at the institution. However, one might deduct that, especially as it emerged from staff interviews, a limited understanding of the current generation of students existed while students were increasingly seen to require more from staff to meet their learning needs. An improved understanding between these two constituents may enhance students' engagement in their learning, better student performance and increased staff satisfaction. This chapter answered two of the research sub-questions, namely "What student engagement practices are currently used by lecturing staff at TPHS?" and "What are current students' perceptions of the value of learning engagement at TPHS?"

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the results and discussion of the data generated for this study. In this chapter some conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the study and the conceptual, practical and further research implications are highlighted. The purpose of this study was to address and answer the research question: “How, if at all, is student engagement currently employed at The Private Hotel School (TPHS) as a possible strategy to enhance student success?” The conclusions to follow illustrate that the research question has been adequately addressed by the theoretical and empirical findings of this study.

5.2 Conclusions

The conclusions contained in this section stem from the literature perspectives provided in Chapter 2 as well as the empirical findings reported in Chapter 4 of this study.

From the literature perspectives in Chapter 2 it is clear that the higher education scene is changing and transforming rapidly (Jansen & Taylor, 2003; CHE, 2004b; Wyatt, 2011; CHE, 2013). Higher education providers and educators are at the centre of this change (Mott, 2000:24; Frick & Kapp, 2009:255). One may also conclude that the changing student bodies are of particular interest to higher education providers as the students’ changing needs prompt new inquiries into how such needs are to be addressed (Collins & Tilson, 2001:172). Student engagement is thus consistently identified as a means of addressing the changing nature of the current generation of students to meet their diverse needs and preferences (Morgan, 2014) while at the same time enhancing student success (Salmon, 1989, cited in Mann 2001:7; Lewis *et al.*, 2011:251; Henning, 2012:15). In this study the concept of student engagement was the central focus. Student engagement may be defined as the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired

outcomes of college (Henning, 2012:15; Smith *et al.*, 2012:151). It is important to note that the student engagement construct is no longer considered merely in terms of cognitive competence as there is currently much greater understanding of what constitutes the entire student. Considering a private higher education institution's accountability to offer quality education (Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009; Cruce *et al.*, 2008) and to foster student success, this study sought to determine to what extent student engagement is being utilised at TPHS. For this purpose students and staff of the institution were consulted using a mixed methodology design (see Plowright, 2011) with both non-narrative and narrative data. From the findings it became clear that TPHS and its educators recognise the changing nature of the students and that they value the concept and practices of student engagement to foster student success. The following sections present conclusions on specific aspects of student engagement that emerged from this study.

5.2.1 Current perceptions at The Private Hotel School of student engagement

From the empirical data generated (see Chapter 3 for the design and methodology) and reported (see Chapter 4 for findings and discussion) in this study, the following conclusions may be drawn about the current perception of students and staff on student engagement at TPHS:

5.2.1.1 Students' perceptions of student engagement

Students favour practices that engage them in their own learning and they agree that more such practices should be implemented. From feedback obtained during the focus group interviews it became clear that students place much emphasis on the lecturers' role in fostering engagement to which one might respond that they perhaps do not recognise their own responsibility in ensuring they engage both in and outside of the classroom. It appears that students are more likely to respond to conditions the educators create for engagement rather than actively seeking opportunities to engage. Students also prefer a classroom environment where they feel comfortable, where the lecturer asks for their opinions and inputs, and where the lecturer uses a variety of teaching styles to meet the variety of learning preferences, and an environment where physical movement and real-life examples by the lecturer promote their attention and broaden their understanding. Students admit to not

spending much time engaging in their learning outside of the classroom or with their peers, especially peers from a different ethnic group. Considering that there is much evidence that in-class and out-of-class learning are mutually supportive, such findings may require some further in-depth attention.

5.2.1.2 Staff's perceptions of student engagement

Staff at TPHS perceive student engagement as important and therefore consider it a priority for them as educators. From the feedback obtained through the staff questionnaires, engagement practices used by lecturers at TPHS were identified. Staff members were of the opinion that students cannot be expected to engage naturally and much time and effort may be needed to get students to engage in situations where they are required to adhere to workload demands – some of these unrelated to teaching. From the individual interviews with staff it became clear that lecturers have different views on the current generation of TPHS students and how they could respond to their needs. While one lecturer acknowledged that the current generation of TPHS students are better engaged by including aspects from their everyday life, another lecturer felt that students are lazy and must be forced to engage. One may conclude that in order to align staff perceptions of the current generation of students, a greater awareness of and education on the current generation of students may be necessary. This may aid lecturers in better meeting students' needs and eventually promote student performance.

5.2.1.3 Final conclusions regarding perceptions of student engagement at The Private Hotel School

The perceptions of students and staff on student engagement seem to correspond in more than one way as both parties favour engagement. They also recognise that lecturers play a major role in facilitating student engagement. Theoretical perspectives based on previous research pointed out that student engagement is a shared responsibility between educators and students (see the research reported in Chapter 2 and in particular Cruce, 2008:541; Henning, 2012; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012; Strom & Strom 2013:54; Zepke *et al.*, 2014) and one may conclude from the empirical findings that the notion of accountability needs to be fostered with students at TPHS. It is important for students to increasingly take responsibility for their own

learning and success. This issue also involves lecturers who are co-responsible and need to be assisted in infusing student engagement into everyday classroom practices. Such accountability should also be shared by TPHS as an educational institution.

5.2.2 Facilitating student engagement

Although student engagement is a shared responsibility between educators and students (Cruce *et al.*, 2008:541; Henning, 2012; Wawrzynski *et al.*, 2012; Strom & Strom 2013:54; Zepke *et al.*, 2014), the empirical findings of this study show that the students at TPHS depend heavily on their lecturers to create opportunities and sustain environments in which they can engage freely and comfortably. The research has also indicated that the lecturers at TPHS realise and accept this co-responsibility. Various strategies for facilitating student engagement were reported (see Chapters 2 and 4). Such strategies include linking theory to real-life situations, using a variety of teaching styles to address the variety of learning styles, using activities and physical movement in the class, and stimulating interest among students on a topic or subject. Although the feedback from students indicated that lecturers do indeed make efforts to actively engage them, they also stated that they want more engagement to be facilitated. For this reason one may conclude that theoretically informed decisions by TPHS lecturers to explore engagement strategies and activities would be important. Such engagement strategies are outlined by De Frondeville (2009) and Wolpert-Gawron (2012) in Chapter 2 which may serve as a source for lecturers at TPHS and answers the research sub-question: “What possible student engagement strategies may enhance student success at TPHS?”

5.2.3 Engagement for success

Many sources in the literature recognise student engagement as a means of enhancing student success (Kuh *et al.*, 2005:44; Wyatt, 2011; Henning, 2012). From the empirical findings of this study it is clear that the educators at TPHS agree with the notion of student success and thus actively encourage student engagement. The aim of this study was, however, not to prove a direct link between student engagement and student success, but merely to determine whether student

engagement is being practised at TPHS and whether it is considered a possible means of enhancing student success.

5.3 Implications of the study

Research findings and conclusions generally have conceptual and practical implications as well as implications for further research. The implications of this study are discussed next.

5.3.1 Conceptual implications

When this study commenced I as researcher had a fairly good understanding of the terms 'student engagement' and 'student success'. By the time I had completed this study the depth of my understanding of both these constructs had changed. In the future and based on this study I would firstly like to promote initiatives to assist educators at TPHS to become more aware of the typical characteristics that are prominent within the current generation of students and as reported in the literature. These student characteristics are experienced by educators on an everyday basis, but due to a misinterpretation of students' conduct, they are experienced as negative. One might argue that with a better understanding, as stated by Westerman (2007), a better relationship may emerge between educators and students (see Chapter 2). Secondly, and also based on the findings of this study, I would like to assist TPHS educators in better understanding and practising student engagement, including the benefits thereof and the various ways to facilitate it. Such understanding, particularly with regard to how it may contribute to student success, should be a priority for the educators of TPHS. Implementation of such initiatives will have to be planned and timed well, but the benefits may have a positive impact on students and their learning success.

5.3.2 Practical implications

For student engagement to become an everyday occurrence in the classrooms of TPHS, changes will have to be made. Based on this study it is clear that educators at TPHS will have to rethink and redesign their study guides and assignments to allow increased opportunities for engagement. Furthermore, the teaching styles of the educators may need to change to facilitate engagement more actively and

purposefully. Students may also need to be educated on their roles in and responsibility for engaging with their own learning which could only be to their own advantage. Also (as shown in Table 4.3, Chapter 4), TPHS may consider offering engagement opportunities such as an additional language course, community projects, study skills development courses and academic guidance as students are interested in becoming involved with such activities. The data (see Table 4.4, Chapter 4) also suggest that TPHS might consider investing more time and effort in activities that can contribute to students' holistic development. Such activities could include focussing on writing skills and computer literacy, the latter being a competence students will specifically need to develop as they will be confronted with technology in future workplaces. From the study it became clear that awareness among students of their responsibility to create opportunities for engagement in their own learning is lacking. The implication is thus that TPHS students need to be made more acutely aware of such responsibility.

5.3.3 Implications for further research

As this study was confined to TPHS it cannot be generalised to other settings; however, it may be duplicated in other settings. Such research would provide interesting comparative data and findings which may be used to strengthen student engagement in private higher education institutions of the same kind. Further aspects that may be inquired into and which were not stressed in this study are student diversity and the role of student engagement in addressing the increasingly diverse needs and preferences of students in a transformational South African higher education setting. Another research possibility may be to delve more deeply into the relationship between student success and student engagement, as research in general shows positive signs in this respect but has not been well explored as yet in South African private higher education settings.

5.4 Final remarks

The higher education environment is ever-changing and the demands from various stakeholders and constituents are increasing. Since much emphasis is placed on higher education institutions' responsibility to prepare a future workforce, student

success is at the order of the day. Student engagement – and not merely looking at student marks and performance – is enjoying increased attention because it is considered as a means of fostering student success in a broader and more holistic manner. From the research in this study it is evident that student engagement is important as a developmental issue – also at institutions such as TPHS. The educators at this institution are aware of the importance of student engagement in contributing to student success and therefore make a conscious effort to promote engagement practices. Such efforts are to be applauded and acknowledged, but there is also much room for improvement. Students at TPHS perceive engagement practices as favourable and even express the desire for more engagement opportunities to be created. It is clearly important to make students aware of their responsibility to take charge of their own learning, including efforts towards increased active engagement, and to sensitise institutions such as TPHS to the need for supporting both staff and students towards student engagement.

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Addendum A: Staff interview questions

Staff interviews consisted of the two open-ended questions listed below.

1. What is your view on student engagement?
2. How do you think student engagement is best facilitated?

Addendum B: Student focus group interview questions

Student focus group interview questions consisted of the four questions listed below:

1. What factors make you want to engage?
2. What factors make you want to engage less?
3. Do you engage more in some classes than others? If so, why?
4. Describe an ideal class.

Addendum C: Example of transcribed interview data as generated from one focus group

(Focus Group 2, Respondents 5 to 8)

1. What factors make you want to engage?

R5: I prefer to engage in smaller classes where I know the people and the lecturer.

R6: Yes, the personal interaction at PHS helps to take part in discussions. Lecturers know the students and make discussions personal. I also think students will talk more about a topic if they have knowledge about it.

R7: I agree; I won't talk about a topic unless I know the information is correct.

R8: Sometimes I don't want to engage when the discussion goes off topic. I just want the lecturer to give the information we need to know.

R5: The participation mark encourages me to participate.

2. What factors make you want to engage less?

R6: When I don't like the people who are in my class with me I don't want to engage with them. And if I don't know anything about the topic I don't want to engage.

R5: I sometimes don't want to answer a question because I don't want to sound like a know-it-all, some students are like that and I don't want to be as well.

R7: When I feel I have answered enough questions I don't answer any more so that someone else can get a chance to answer as well.

R8: When I am not in the mood to talk or take part I won't engage. Also, some students are shy.

R6: Being from another country I sometimes don't take part because English is not my first language and sometimes I struggle to express myself properly.

R7: When the topic does not interest me I also won't talk about it.

R6: Also, when I am scared that my answer may be wrong I won't give it.

3. Do you engage more in some classes than others? If so, why?

R5: Yes, if I am interested in the subject I will engage more in the class. Also, some classes have a boardroom set-up because we are a small group which makes it more fun to engage than bigger classes.

R8: Yes, smaller classes are definitely more engaging.

R6: I engage more if the lecturer asks lots of questions and if the class is interesting.

R7: Yes, the lecturer plays a big role, because sometimes lecturers make you feel intimidated.

4. Describe an ideal class

R5: I prefer a class where you can walk out and know you covered the right work and that it is important.

R8: I like when a class is practical, so if we can move around and work in groups. It's not nice to sit still for so long. It is also interesting when lecturers tell about their own experiences on a topic.

R7: Yes and when lecturers ask students about their experience, that makes it more personal.

R6: The lecturer should also move around and make the class fun and interesting.

R5: I like when we debate about a topic in class.

Addendum D: Example of transcribed interview data as generated from one staff respondent

Respondent R2

1. What is your view on student engagement?

I think that some students will value it but some won't. Some students need time and silence to absorb certain concepts while others need active engagement. It will also differ according to subject matter and cognitive ability and also critical thinking ability. Some students want physical engagement as well like hugs.

2. How do you think student engagement is best facilitated?

The educator must know how to 'read' each student and facilitate engagement in more than one way. However, this is only really possible in smaller groups. In large groups the educator can engage only with those that engage themselves. By actively trying to engage the backrow sitters attention is placed on them and may just ignore the engagement opportunity or 'freeze'.

Addendum E: Ethics Committee approval notice



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Approved with Stipulations New Application

27-Aug-2014
Theron, Erika E

Proposal #: DESC/Theron/Aug2014/2

Title: Student engagement to enhance student success at a private higher education institution.

Dear Ms Erika Theron,

Your New Application received on 08-Aug-2014, was reviewed
Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 22-Aug-2014-21-Aug-2015

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:

1. DESC CHECKLIST

1.1) Section 2(b): Explain which information will be gathered directly from The Private Hotel School (TPHS) that is not available in the public domain.

1.2) Section 4: The risk level is low, rather than minimal, as the study focuses on, amongst other potentially controversial issues, the challenges educators in higher education face in adapting their teaching practices to account for the diversity of the student body.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

2.1) Will the anonymity of The Private Hotel School be maintained in the reporting of the results and if so, how? The process of how confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained should be stated in section 6 of the informed consent form.

2.2) If qualitative data are collected, care should be taken to ensure the anonymity of the participants in the reporting of the results. This could be quite challenging, considering the small number of students and staff involved. The researcher should take care in removing all possible identifiers which could be traced back to an individual.

3. POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher is an employee of the TPHS, but there is no reflection on the potential implications of her, for example, reporting findings that do not reflect positively on TPHS.

4. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The student has confused a request for institutional permission with a request for informed consent. Before clearance can be given, she should submit separate forms that request informed consent from the following groups of participants, and for the following data collection methods:

1. Students, for completing an online questionnaire survey
2. Staff, for completing an online questionnaire survey
3. Students, for group interviews
4. Staff, for individual interviews

5. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The questionnaire requires some language editing.

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your proposal number (DESC/Theron/Aug2014/2) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218089183.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham
REC Coordinator
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)



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Approval Notice
Stipulated documents/requirements

14-Oct-2014
Theron, Erika E

Proposal #: DESC/Theron/Aug2014/2

Title: Student engagement to enhance student success at a private higher education institution.

Dear Ms Erika Theron,

Your **Stipulated documents/requirements** received on 10-Oct-2014, was reviewed
Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham
REC Coordinator
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Addendum F: Informed consent form for staff



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Student engagement to enhance student success at The Private Hotel School.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Erika Theron (MPhil: Higher Education), from the Academic Department of The Private Hotel School. The research results will be contributed to the final thesis of this qualification. You are required to give permission and may be selected as a possible participant in this study because of your position as staff member at The Private Hotel School.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is threefold. Firstly, this study is meant to explore the implications of the diversity of the current student body at TPHS. Educators at the institution might be able to increase their awareness of and develop strategies to address the diversity of student needs they are faced with. Secondly, according to many reports in the media and scholars in the field of education, the secondary school system in South Africa does not adequately prepare learners for higher education. This puts pressure on higher education institutions to fill the gap left by secondary education in addition to what is expected from a higher education institution. This study might indicate which teaching strategies/methods/techniques, involving student engagement, may be suitable for aiding the engagement of students in their learning and success. Thirdly, higher education institutions are experiencing more pressure to demonstrate accountability as they are responsible for the preparation of the future workforce of South Africa. It is thus vital that quality higher education is offered and engage students in learning that will prepare them as best possible for their chosen careers.

2. PROCEDURES

If you consent to and/or volunteer to participate in this study, you are giving permission for the following to occur during the research study:

The study will start with a survey that will mainly involve data generated by existing standardised staff questionnaires, namely the SASSE (South African Survey on Student Engagement). The survey will be made available online for all participants. The participants will include educators at TPHS comprising of five lecturers. The current version of the standardised questionnaires includes only close-ended questions, however the opportunity exists to possibly include open-ended questions. Sections of the questionnaire will include determining demographic information of participants. The questionnaires will be available for 48 hours and participants can complete these in their own time. Participation will be completely voluntary and anonymous. Although the number of participants at TPHS will be limited, no statistical data other than descriptive statistics will be generated in order to determine student engagement trends. The SASSE survey will be followed by individual interviews with the five staff members in order to verify the trends that have emerged from the survey data.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

No foreseeable risks.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The study is intended to hold benefits for the staff of The Private Hotel School, as well as, ultimately, the hospitality industry. Through the study it should become clear how to best employ the notion of student engagement as a way of enhancing student success. The Private Hotel School and staff will benefit from better academic performance and success of their students and the hospitality industry will receive graduates equipped for the challenges ahead.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Not applicable.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of anonymous participation and coding procedures of qualitative data to protect the identities of participants.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to consent to and/or be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also

refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Erika Theron on 072 202 4569 or erika.theron@gmail.com

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouché@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Erika Theron in Afrikaans and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

As representative of the staff members of The Private Hotel School, I hereby consent to staff members of The Private Hotel School to voluntarily participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Susina Jooste
Director



Signature of Participant

01 / 09 / 2014
Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to *Susina Jooste*. She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans and no translator was used.



Signature of Investigator

01 / 09 / 2014
Date

Addendum G: Informed consent form for students



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Student engagement to enhance student success at The Private Hotel School.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Erika Theron (MPhil: Higher Education), from the Academic Department of The Private Hotel School. The research results will be contributed to the final thesis of this qualification. You are required to give permission and may be selected as a possible participant in this study because of your student status at The Private Hotel School.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is threefold. Firstly, this study is meant to explore the implications of the diversity of the current student body at TPHS. Educators at the institution might be able to increase their awareness of and develop strategies to address the diversity of student needs they are faced with. Secondly, according to many reports in the media and scholars in the field of education, the secondary school system in South Africa does not adequately prepare learners for higher education. This puts pressure on higher education institutions to fill the gap left by secondary education in addition to what is expected from a higher education institution. This study might indicate which teaching strategies/methods/techniques, involving student engagement, may be suitable for aiding the engagement of students in their learning and success. Thirdly, higher education institutions are experiencing more pressure to demonstrate accountability as they are responsible for the preparation of the future workforce of South Africa. It is thus vital that quality higher education is offered and engage students in learning that will prepare them as best possible for their chosen careers.

2. PROCEDURES

If you consent to and/or volunteer to participate in this study, you are giving permission for the following to occur during the research study:

The study will start with a survey that will mainly involve data generated by existing standardised student questionnaires, namely the SASSE (South African Survey on Student Engagement). The survey will be made available online for all participants. The participants will include the students of PHS, comprising of 40 – 50 students. The current version of the standardised questionnaires includes only close-ended questions, however the opportunity exists to possibly include open-ended questions. Sections of the questionnaire will include determining demographic information of participants. The questionnaires will be available for 48 hours and participants can complete these in their own time. Participation will be completely voluntary and anonymous. Although the number of participants at TPHS will be limited, no statistical data other than descriptive statistics will be generated in order to determine student engagement trends. The SASSE survey will be followed by two group interviews with a randomly selected group of TPHS students in order to verify the trends that have emerged from the survey data.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

No foreseeable risks.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The study is intended to hold benefits for the students and The Private Hotel School, as well as, ultimately, the hospitality industry. Through the study it should become clear how to best employ the notion of student engagement as a way of enhancing student success. This means that students may perform better as their learning as well as their personal development is being enhanced.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Not applicable.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of anonymous participation and coding procedures of qualitative data to protect the identities of participants.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to consent to and/or be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also

refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Erika Theron on 072 202 4569 or erika.theron@gmail.com

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouché@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Erika Theron in Afrikaans and I am in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

As representative of the students of The Private Hotel School, I hereby consent to the students of The Private Hotel School to voluntarily participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Yolani Abrahams
SRC Chairperson



Signature of Participant

01 / 09 / 2014
Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to *Yolani Abrahams*. She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans and no translator was used.



Signature of Investigator

01 / 09 / 2014
Date

Addendum H: Institutional permission letters



29 August 2014

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the lecturers of The Private Hotel School, I hereby consent to an employee of TPHS, Erika Theron, to conduct research on TPHS's campus, specifically its lecturing staff. I agree to questionnaires being distributed to lecturing staff as well as personal interviews to be conducted with lecturing staff.

For any queries, do not hesitate to contact me on:

Phone: 021 881 3792

E-mail: susina.jooste@privatehotelschool.co.za

Kind regards,

Mrs Susina Jooste

Director: Academic Development



29 August 2014

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the students of The Private Hotel School, I hereby consent to an employee of TPHS, Erika Theron, to conduct research on TPHS's campus, specifically its students. I agree to questionnaires being distributed to students as well as personal interviews to be conducted with students.

For any queries, do not hesitate to contact me on:

Phone: 021 881 3792

E-mail: yabrahams@privatehotelschool.co.za

Kind regards,

Yolani Abrahams

Chairperson: Student Representative Council